DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 110 879 CG 010 006

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|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Butler, Dodie; And Others |
| TITLE | Runaway House: A Youth-Run Service Project. |
| INSTITUTION | National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Rockville, Md. Center for Studies of Child and Family Mental Health.; Special Approaches in Juvenile Assistance, Washington, D.C. |
| REPORT NO | DHEW-ADM-74-44 |
| PUB DATE | 74 |
| NOTE | 75p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.76 HC-$3.32 Plus Postage |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Counseling Centers; Delinquency; Foster Homes; Guidance Counseling; Parent Child Relationship; *Program Descriptions; *Voluntary Agencies; *Youth; *Youth Agencies |
| IDENTIFIERS | *Runaway Youth |

ABSTRACT

This booklet describes Special Approaches in Juvenile Assistance (SAJA), a nonprofit corporation that consists of: (1) the Runaway House, a temporary shelter and counseling program for people under the age of 18 who have run away from home; (2) two foster group homes in which the workers and young people share responsibility for cooking, cleaning and all decisions that relate to the house; (3) a Job-finding Cooperative that provides a free alternative to regular employment agencies; (4) a free school, and (5) several associated projects; including a farm, a people's law institute, housing co-op, etc. This booklet discusses the history, organization, funding, staffing, clientele, and services provided by SAJA. (RWP)

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# runaway house

## A Youth-Run Service Project

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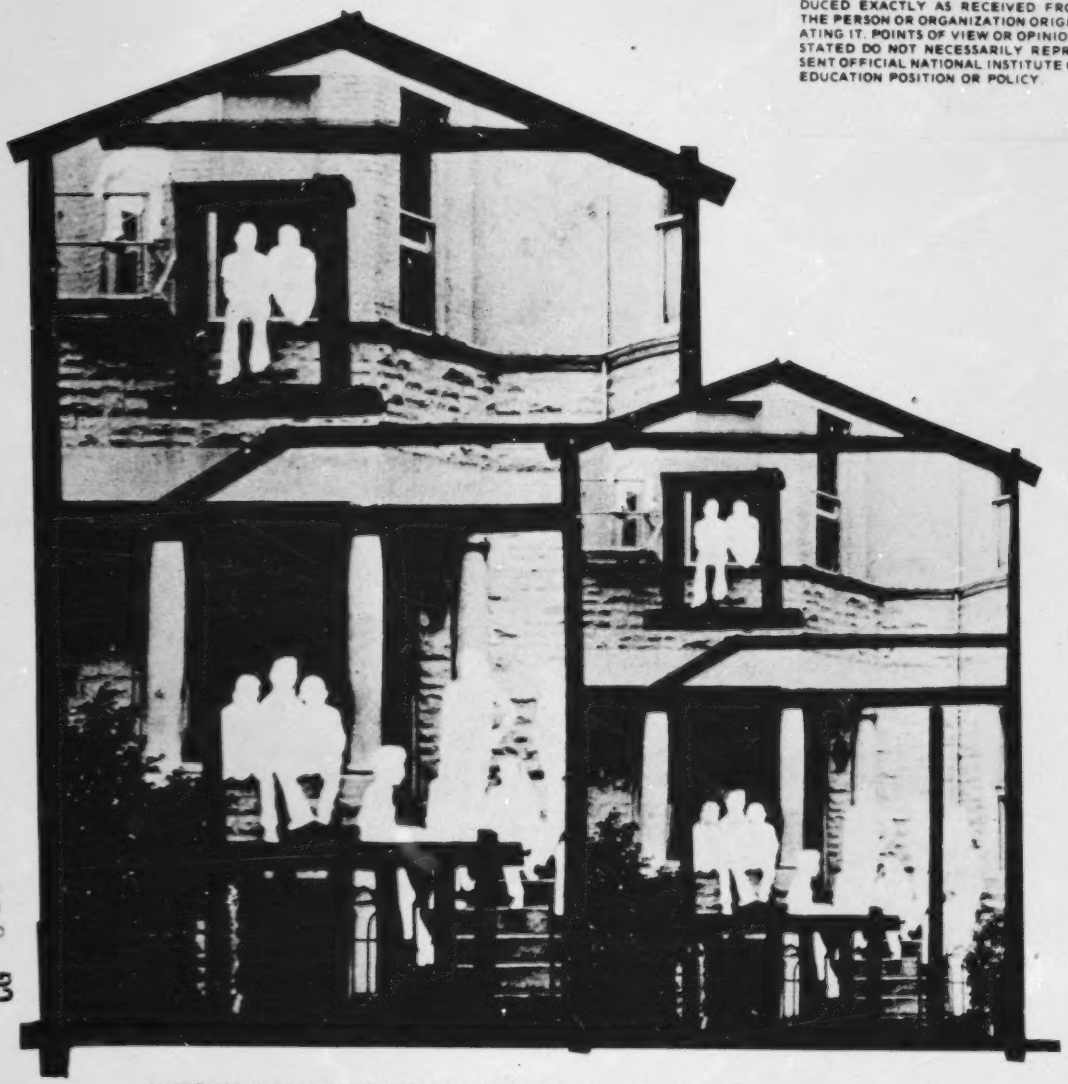

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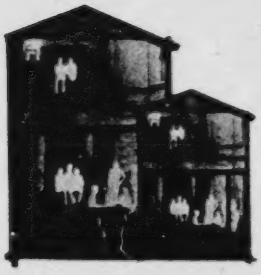
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

# runaway house

## A Youth-Run Service Project

by

Dodie Butler,
Runaway House and
Group Foster Home Counselor
with
Joe Reiner,
New Education Project Coordinator
and
Bill Treanor,
SAJA Coordinator



A Report Prepared for the
National Institute of Mental Health
Center for Studies of Child and Family Mental Health
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Maryland 20852

This report was prepared by the staff of Special Approaches in Juvenile Assistance, under Contract No. NIH 71–584 with the Center for Studies of Child and Family Mental Health, Division of Special Mental Health Programs, National Institute of Mental Health

DHEW Publication No.(ADM)74–44
Printed 1974

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402

## FOREWORD

Runaway House: A Youth-Run Service Project is presented as an example of an initiative which may be of interest to people concerned with counter-culture service projects. Very often youth decide to "do their own thing"; nonetheless, they are frequently enmeshed in a maze of bureaucratic requirements and standards, special legal statutes, and sometimes seemingly restrictive professionalism.

Without endorsing this or any other specific model of a service project to meet a pressing human need, we recognize that the experience in setting up and operating a Runaway House as described here contains elements which can be shared and which may assist other young people in their quest for non-traditional, nonprofessional routes to self-help.

In the field of human services, we are aware that limited manpower resources call for creative and innovative alternatives to traditional solutions, and that these alternatives have frequently met with success among the young. Research on such techniques, however nonconformist they may appear to be, may well yield helpful and useful clues to some of the most dynamic styles of service for and among 20th Century youth.

In addition to serving as an example of a youth-run project, this report may also aid communities in establishing their own service delivery systems. Many parents would be willing to pool their efforts to develop services of help for their children if they knew how.

The report is presented here as submitted by the authors, with no attempt made to influence its content, thrust, or style to conform to conventional standards, practices, or attitudes. Therein lies its freshness and if we tune in to the experience of these young people, we may have something of value to learn. This then, while it neither reflects an endorsement nor a position of the National Institute of Mental Health, is *Runaway House: Report of a Youth-Run Service Project.*

FLORENCE H. STOVER
Coordinator,
Child Mental Health Activities
National Institute of Mental Health

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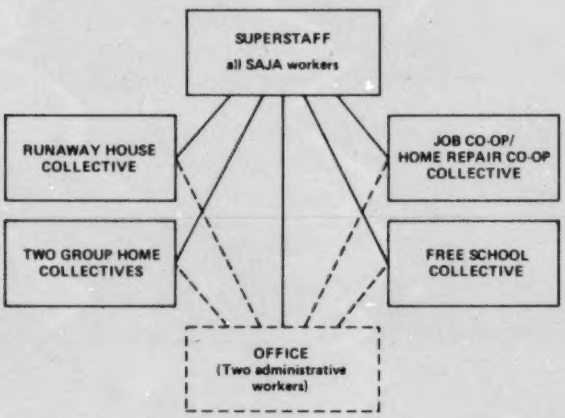
## CHAPTER I. SAJA—A COMMUNITY OF YOUTH PROJECTS

On paper, Special Approaches in Juvenile Assistance (SAJA), is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to "developing and implementing new approaches to the problems that face many adolescents today, providing free or low-cost services to adolescents and their families in the Washington metropolitan area" . . . and . . . "being in the vanguard of community mental health . . . by offering programs and services . . . lacking in programs of traditional social service agencies . . . ." SAJA was incorporated in November 1969 to establish nonprofit corporate status for the Runaway House shelter/counseling program and for any other projects that evolved as the people in the organization saw needs arising in the community. Since that time, SAJA has grown to include the Runaway House, two group foster homes, a free job-finding co-op, a summer employment program for neighborhood young people, a free high school. It also extends nonprofit status to associated programs: a day care center, a free school information clearinghouse, and a free law school. Although the articles of incorporation are signed (according to law) by people called "directors," SAJA is run collectively by the people within these various projects.

When we, its members, talk about SAJA we are talking about a group of people—a large, counter-cultural collective, which includes the project workers and the young people involved in the group homes and the free high school. Each week we meet in a large decision-making collective of all the project workers, which we unabashedly call "superstaff" (the kids are getting it together to become involved in this group). The "superstaff," about 24 people, make all the decisions that affect the whole organization—division of money among projects, initiation of new projects, special purchases, etc.,—and have input on decisions about major changes within individual projects. Smaller project collectives make decisions specific to the individual projects. Two administrative workers handle fund-raising, public relations, a lot of agency contact, and attend the smaller collective meetings to tie the whole thing together.




### The Office

The two SAJA administrators work out of the SAJA office through which flows much of the organization's contact with the community, with job applicants, with funding sources, etc. The office fields a lot of outside contact, channels information to the projects, interviews job applicants, and keeps SAJA's books. Working in and out of the office, the two administrative workers coordinate the various projects.

As the organization grew, from Runaway House and one group home at the end of 1969 to its present size by the fall of 1971, administrative work involved in running SAJA grew tenfold. The office was set up to more efficiently manage the administrative work generated by each of the projects—work that could, if necessary, be taken care of by the workers in each project. We tried to cope with getting routine paperwork done by hiring various secretaries to manage the office. However, straight secretarial work is terribly alienating, perhaps doubly so in an organization dedicated to giving people satisfying work situations. Therefore, we had a high turnover rate among secretaries.

As the organization grew, the project workers became less and less in touch with the total picture of SAJA. People's authority hangups got in the way and they saw the administrators as different from them, not only in function but in rank. People didn't see that the office was not an entity unto itself, but existed only because of the work generated by the projects themselves.

In trying to cut down on this alienation, we have decided to sacrifice some of our efficiency. Everyone in the organization now works in the office 1 day each month so that everyone will understand better how the office fits into things and how it belongs to them. The routine work is generated by all the projects and the decisions made in the office affect everyone. Now all the

SAJA workers are involved in both aspects. Of course this means that the jobs of the actual administrators are more difficult because there is no one in the office all of the time. Although we are still wrestling with problems of continuity, lost messages, and letters that don't get answered, we feel that the loss of efficiency is worth it (and as people gain more experience, things should run more smoothly) because this is a further extension of the collective method.

## Runaway House

The Runaway House is a temporary shelter and counseling program for young people under the age of 18 who have run away from home, reform school, mental hospital, etc. These kids are allowed to stay at Runaway House if they agree to work on the problems they ran away from—defining options and goals—or if they look for a more stable, permanent living situation. They are expected to accept the rules of the house. In return, the Runaway House workers agree to help the runaways choose among the alternatives available to them and to provide a safe living situation in which to think things out. The Runaway House operates under one basic premise: with a supportive atmosphere and some appropriate advice, young people can make practical decisions concerning their futures.

When fully staffed, five young adult counselors are involved full time at the Runaway House, with four living in. With the SAJA director and administrator, they comprise the Runaway House staff collective. This collective makes all decisions concerning individual runaways, house maintenance, and staff selection. Two mental health professionals volunteer as consultants, one for staff problems and the other for runaway counseling support.

The counselors receive $50.00 a week plus room and board. The whole operation costs $15,000 to $17,000 a year, which includes rent on the building, staff salaries, and food and maintenance expenses. This cost averages out to less than $2.00 per night per runaway. There is no charge to the young people. We receive funding from church groups, some private contributions, and local foundations.

A runaway may contact his parents at any time to talk with them or to arrange a family conference, but he is not required to obtain parental permission to stay at the Runaway House. We do encourage him to make telephone contact with his parents to ensure them of his safety. Although we give whatever support we feel is necessary, the runaway himself is responsible to choose his own course of action.

Most kids usually stay at Runaway House from 3 to 10 days—though some with very difficult situations have stayed for months.

We keep information about people staying in Runaway House strictly confidential. We do not reveal who is staying at the house by telephone or to people -- whether friends, parents, or police -- who show up at the front door. While we recognize the definite legal risks involved in this policy, we have decided that this is the best and only way to win the trust of those we are trying to help. Counselors will not approach anyone connected with a specific runaway without the runaway's express permission and knowledge of each contact. This lays a groundwork of trust upon which the counselor and runaway can build a healthy, problem-solving relationship.

The Runaway House day is relatively unstructured. Counselors get the kids up for morning cleanup. Group meetings are usually held in the morning, barring interruptions or other commitments. The rest of the day is devoted to individual counseling and to meetings with staff and consultants.

The house is closed for quiet hours from 3:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., in the summer, and from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., in the winter. This routine gets the kids out of the house for a few hours (prying television addicts away from the tube) and allows the counselors time for themselves. Although this brief respite is often interrupted by house duties—meetings, court appearances, etc.—it has proved necessary for the workers who would otherwise be on duty 24 hours a day. The kids understand the need for quiet hours and cooperate well. Since quiet hours for the staff correspond with the closing time for D. C. schools, there is little problem for the kids with the police during the hours they are out of the house.

We do not assume any responsibility for the runaway outside the Runaway House. We are unable, and unwilling, to do so. Runaway teenagers, by the act of leaving home (or reform school, mental hospital, etc.) have attempted to take control of their own lives and must learn their capabilities through trial and error. We let kids know what laws are and what parts of the city are safe, but they are on their own.

Runaways are required to get their own food, to observe

house rules, to be in on time (midnight during the week and 2:00 a.m., on weekends), and to be working on their personal problems. Kids have a tendency to live up to whatever expectations they are given. We expect kids to take responsible care of themselves. They usually do.

Runaway House also acts as a youth advocacy center. We provide information about family counseling services in the runaway's home community, help people with foster home placement, and supply personal contacts in the juvenile court and public welfare bureaucracies. We also supply information about medical, psychiatric, and educational services available to a runaway.

We've been doing these things for over 3 years. As of 1972, more than 3,000 people had stayed at Runaway House; the present rate exceeds 120 young people per month.

## Group Foster Homes

The two group foster homes, Second and Third Houses, are a cross between a large family and a commune. There are two resident workers and six kids in each house. We have one support person who divides his time between both houses and we are looking for another. The workers and young people in each group home share equally in all decisions that relate to the house, including intake decisions on new residents. Responsibilities for cooking and house cleaning are also shared by everyone. The workers in the houses give emotional support and attention to the kids and oversee the practical work of running a house. They also work closely with the parents, caseworkers, and therapists of individual kids. Unlike a normal family, a worker's commitment is only for a year and the kids remain in the house for varying lengths of time—usually until they can move out to live on their own.

We accept young people between the ages of 13 and 17. We try to realistically assess who will fit into the program, and will not take kids with a history of violent behavior, drug addiction, or girls with children. The young people in the houses are on referral from welfare departments and juvenile services of five D.C. area jurisdictions, as well as private mental health facilities and private placement by their parents. These young people either go to public or free high school or hold jobs.

Group sessions are held weekly to deal with personal and house problems and to maintain cohesion among the group of people in each house. These meetings are attended by a volunteer psychiatric consultant who gives the house residents feedback on what he sees going on. Each house has another volunteer consultant who works with the staff on the personal problems that arise from working in such a setting.

The two resident staff members receive $50.00 a week plus room and board. Support people, who work full-time, but live outside the houses, receive $75.00 a week plus board. The houses are financially self-sufficient. We receive $350 a month as an institutional stipend from referring agencies for each young person placed with us. At times this rate is reduced so that we can take kids on private placement. Rent, food, clothing, entertainment, allowances, staff salaries, etc., are all covered by the house incomes.

We do feel more responsibility for these young people placed in our care than we do for the people who stay at Runaway House. However, we do not assume a parental type of responsibility; the houses are not highly disciplined and structured. We rely on personal relationships and the medium of the group to support the young people in getting themselves together.

The Second House has been in existence for 2 years, the Third House for 1. We have housed and worked with 26 young men and women since Second House opened. Several of these kids are now independent and are supporting themselves. Twelve are still living in the group homes. Others have returned to their families or other living situations. Six did not work out in the group homes and were referred back to the agencies that had placed them with us.

Although our success has been varied and our project is still somewhat young to evaluate, the basic concept of a group foster home with a young staff in a minimal parenting role seems to be a good one. The ways we as workers relate to the kids and the structures within the houses are constantly being challenged both by the young people and ourselves. The group homes will continue to evolve as the people within them grow and change through the process of living together.

## Job Co-op

The Job-finding Cooperative which began in February 1971 is a SAJA project funded originally by a local government grant and now maintained by a grant from

Jewish Social Services. For the first 5 months it was staffed with only one worker and has since expanded to four staff members. Over 750 people have asked the Job Co-op for help in finding work. Their ages have ranged from 14 to 54, but most are teenagers or in their 20's. Each week, the Job Co-op helps about 20 people find full or part-time work.

The Job Co-op provides an alternative to regular employment agencies. We do not reject people because of appearance or arrest records, nor do we require tests or extensive background information and references. Our services are free to people looking for work and to employers, although we do accept donations.

The Job Co-op works with people who often would not be accepted by regular employment agencies. We help teenagers, runaways, and transients find temporary employment. We also find jobs for people who live in the area who want part-time jobs which will pay for rent and food and still save free time for other pursuits. We are also trying to work with job applicants and employers in setting up jobs that are not alienating. This may involve splitting one full-time job between two people, or getting women into jobs traditionally reserved for men and vice versa.

The Job Co-op has provided new avenues for people to earn a livelihood by establishing several workers' cooperatives which are interrelated and coordinated with other free community services. These include a bread and yogurt-making cooperative, a natural foods catering service, and a home repair co-op. In all of these cooperatives, profits are shared and decisions are made collectively. The aim of the co-ops is to allow people to free themselves from the restraints of regular jobs by setting their own hours and by being responsible only to each other.

The Job Co-op staff functions as a collective. Tasks are divided and decisions are made by everyone. The workers solicit jobs through personal contact with employers, interview people looking for work, and do the research and organizing needed to establish more cooperatives.

## Summer Programs

In May of 1971, SAJA agreed to sponsor 25 young people contracted through the Catholic Archdiocese of Washington under the citywide Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC) program. This is a 9-week summer job program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. Each NYC enrollee is paid $1.60 per hour for 26 hours of work per week.

Four staff people were hired to organize the program and to work with the 25 young people who were between the ages of 14 and 20. They recruited kids from the Dupont Circle/Adams Morgan neighborhoods in Washington—white, black, and Latino teenagers, most of whom came from low-income families or from the SAJA group homes and neighborhood communes. In an attempt to come up with interesting and meaningful jobs, the workers contacted community-based activist groups and nonprofit organizations.

In addition to their work experiences, the kids received tutoring in school subjects and personal counseling from the staff members. There were also regular trips to the SAJA farm near Frederick, Maryland, and several parties during the course of the summer.

## SAJA Farm

During the summer of 1971 we were given the use of a 133 acre farm near Frederick, Maryland, about an hour's drive from the city. The farm provided SAJA staff and kids and the NYC kids a place to unwind. The workers staffed the farm during most of the summer. They worked with people who came out from the city and with three boys for whom the farm served as a summer group foster home. These workers were not paid (being on the farm was seen as a bonus, and we could not afford the money at the time), but received room and board.

## Foster Placement

Through SAJA's experience with young people in the Runaway House and the group foster homes, the need for finding individual foster homes has long been apparent. Many of the kids we see are chronic runaways; they just cannot make it at home and badly need an alternative to reform schools and the streets. In May 1971 we hired a woman to set up a foster placement program in an attempt to find younger people in their 20's and 30's—married, single, or living communally—to be foster parents to these young people. She received the regular salary—$75.00 a week—for staff members living outside of the houses.

The actual program never got off the ground. The planner was working alone and had a difficult time organizing the program. She was also stymied by the D.C. Welfare Department's licensing requirements. According to regulations, we have to be set up like a traditional social service agency to become a licensed foster placement service. We must have the license to receive the Welfare Department's financial support for the kids we place in private homes. By the time this roadblock became clear, we had located about 40 homes with good potential foster parents. However, we were unable to place kids in these homes without financial support from the Welfare Department. Thus, the foster placement program is now at a standstill while we try to discover a new approach that works.

## The New Education Project (NEP)

SAJA's most ambitious undertaking since the group homes is our free high school. Ever since the opening of the Second House, we have been aware of the inadequacies of the D.C. public schools in dealing with the young people who live in the group foster homes. The kids who we were trying to get out of institutions and back into the community were being kicked out of the schools for lack of motivation, absenteeism, and misbehavior. The support we were trying to establish at home was often undone at the public school. Our young people were labeled "troublemakers" and failures, and obligingly lived up to these expectations in the public schools. The trouble that evolved from their hassles at school was putting the whole foster home project in jeopardy, so we had to come up with alternatives to our requirement that all kids in the group homes go to school.

We decided to develop a school, The Satellite Learning Community, that would affiliate itself with the high school in our area, but would offer separate courses for credit that would apply toward graduation from that high school. We received tentative approval, during the long summer of negotiating (1971), from the school superintendent and the majority of the D.C. School Board. However, we came up against three problems: lack of money, lack of support from the principal of the high school, and a lack of confidence in our ability to undertake such an ambitious educational project without prior experience.

At this point, the New Education Project, a 2-year-old free high school which had fallen on hard times, came into the picture. They had one teacher, five students, $1,400, and no building. But they did possess recognition by the D.C. School Board as a degree-granting high school. SAJA had a building, a good reputation among younger people, the ability to raise money, and two staff people who were qualified and wanted to teach in the school. The solution seemed clear: SAJA and New Education Project would join forces.

With the support of the other members of the total SAJA collective—especially the group home workers—these three staff people and 25 kids have developed a school that they affectionately call "Bonzo Ragamuffin Prep." The young people are kids from the old NEP school and the SAJA group homes and others from the neighborhood.

The kids and staff work together to determine the type of school they want. This is facilitated by weekly meetings of the entire school community and by weekly encounter sessions with a volunteer psychologist.

A number of courses are offered, some by the staff members and others by part-time resource people from the community. These include literature, creative writing, foreign languages, math, survival and woodlore, psychology, history, anthropology, nutrition and cooking, photography, drawing and painting, a theater/dance workshop, and music lessons. The school also has taken camping and field trips. In late October there was a Homecoming weekend, complete with touch football, dinner, and a Homecoming dance.

NEP has developed a unique way of financing itself, which should decrease its dependency on outside sources of money such as foundation grants, parental contributions, and large tuition fees. About half of the students work five hours each week in a nearby SAJA-affiliated day care center called Oshkosh Choo Choo Children's Center. The money from this project goes toward supporting the high school and its staff. Two of the students do support work at the Runaway House. They work for their tuition and after that $25.00 is covered, they receive the rest of their wages in cash. Students who do not work at the Runaway House or the day care center are expected to pay $25.00 a month which they earn themselves. The personal circumstances of some students make raising this amount of money impossible. Therefore, we have had to be fairly flexible about the amount of money they pay each month.

Although the amount of money raised by these means is still not sufficient to cover the expenses of the school

and SAJA funds have had to be used to make up the difference, we feel that this is preferable to asking tuition of the parents. One of our main objectives is to help students become aware of and respond to their own academic and emotional needs—which is facilitated by the kids, not their parents, footing the bill and controlling the school.

The school is still growing and changing. We are struggling to motivate many people who have been turned off by traditional education to enjoy reading and learning. Experimenting with new ways to teach and learn and share information and experiences is educational in itself. The academic work going on in the school is only part of the picture. There is a very strong emphasis on self-expression, interpersonal relations, and emotional growth. The school is reaching a firm footing and will probably be around for quite a while.

## Associated Projects

As well as operating our own projects, whose workers are closely tied into the SAJA "superstaff" collective, we are willing to bring projects started outside of SAJA under our tax exemption while control of such projects remains in the hands of the people who started them. These projects are loosely tied to SAJA and the workers do not usually attend meetings of the larger SAJA collective.

## The People's Law Institute

The People's Law Institute is a free law school that was organized early in 1971. Lawyers and other legal experts teach various aspects of the law to community people. Over 400 people have been involved in 20 courses during the past year. These included courses in juvenile law, street law, student rights, landlord-tenant, and military law. The People's Law Institute is also attempting to serve as a lawyer referral service and as a research and investigation staff for incarcerated people who need outside help. The staff also did a great deal of direct and indirect work on many aspects of the Spring Offensive in D.C. (1971). The PLI is primarily volunteer. Expenses are covered by donations and small grants from community organizations.

## Oshkosh School (Choo Choo Children's Center)

The Oshkosh School is a day care center for 15 children, 2 through 4 years old. It is located in the Dupont Circle neighborhood and is self-supporting through parent contributions. Several students from the SAJA high school-NEP work there.

## Free School Clearinghouse

The Free School Clearinghouse offers information on educational problems and coordinates information among area free schools. The Clearinghouse monthly newsletter is mailed to about 800 people, half of whom are students. The Clearinghouse has played an important role in helping two schools begin operation. The Clearinghouse also helps the Runaway House make referrals for runaways' families, who need and can afford private school placement. The Clearinghouse is a shoestring operation. The person running it volunteers her time, and costs are covered by donations.

## The Other Runaway House

Although we enlarged the full-time Runaway House staff to five plus two part-time student workers from the New Education Project, things are still chaotic. The building itself cannot house so many people. The activity generated by twenty people living together, plus answering the phone and the door a hundred times a day, makes uninterrupted counseling difficult.

Some young people simply do not get the kind of attention they expect, need, and deserve. When there are about 10 runaways in the house, the place feels good and has a sense of community. Much of this is lost when the population doubles. Also the staff is forced into a semi-traffic cop/worker role just trying to manage the numbers.

We are thinking of renting another house in the neighborhood to serve as another Runaway House. We hope to house no more than eight runaways at a time, perhaps those who require more work and support. Most would have permission from their parents or the courts to stay there.

Managing two Runaway Houses, finding the staff, and raising the additional money needed (another $17,000

per year) will be difficult. But we must if we want to maintain the quality of the counseling service that we have been providing.

## The Farm

We are looking for rural land within a couple of hours of D.C., which we will buy in order to be able to operate a variety of country programs which people on the staff are interested in. SAJA workers want a place in the country for their own personal needs, as well as the opportunity to acquaint the kids with the great outdoors. The farm would be a base for a summer program and could also serve as a rural group home. It also has great possibilities for use by the school.

## SAJA Training Program

We have received a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health for a paraprofessional training program. The grant provides about $80,000 per year for the 2-year program. This program, will provide training for paraprofessional youth project workers from around the country, as well as new SAJA staff, in project organizing and youth counseling. Trainees will receive training in all of the SAJA projects. They can also plug into other paraprofessional projects in D.C. and will meet with professionally trained people in the mental health field for further information on individual, group, and family counseling. We expect about 72 trainees per year. The grant covers all expenses, including travel, trainee stipends, and staff salaries.

Included in this proposal is a Clearinghouse for information on youth service projects around the country. Hopefully, the Clearinghouse will tie together the network of paraprofessional youth projects in the Nation.

At the end of each 8-month training program, the trainees and SAJA training staff will get together (expenses covered) for a 3-day conference in a city other than Washington, D.C. We hope that these conferences will be held in cities with a variety of nonprofessional youth projects so that further exposure to different ways of operating will be possible. At these conferences the trainees will be able to evaluate the training they have received and discuss the problems they have run into since their involvement with the training program. These conferences will also give people the opportunity to make further contacts among paraprofessional projects.

## Future Plans

The SAJA collective has been discussing several new projects that we feel are needed to help young people help themselves. The final decision to implement these projects remains with the SAJA "superstaff" collective and depends upon financial resources, finding property, finding staff, and especially upon the interest and support of the present SAJA members.

## Housing Co-op

The Housing Co-op will employ one worker at $80.00 per week, as a free service helping young people find a place to live. Young people, freaks, and groups are often discriminated against in housing. Also, many young people who have just arrived in Washington are often unable to find low cost housing and are forced to turn to expensive rooming houses or rip-off roommate referral services. We hope to work with people looking for housing and with landlords, bypassing roommate referral agencies and realtors. We also want to help young people learn to handle renting property responsibly so that they will not be kicked out by disgruntled landlords. This service ties in well with the Job Co-op.

## Alternative House

This would be an alternative to the D.C. Receiving Home, D.C.'s juvenile "jail." We would initially work with young people who are picked up by the police for running away from home. The house workers would then try to counsel the person and his parents before he went to court or went home. After gauging how much work is involved in dealing with apprehended runaways, we will begin to accept young people who are truant, beyond control, or awaiting

trial on soft drug offenses. This project will require a staff of six: four house workers, one court-police liaison, and a project director. It will cost around $50,000 during the first year (we plan to feed these kids). We are now looking for funds to get it going. After proving its worth, the Government can be expected to pay for the project.

## Fourth House

This would be another group foster home in the same neighborhood, based on the same model as Second and Third House. It will be home for two workers and six young people with a support worker probably living outside the house. The cost would be around $25,000 annually. Fourth House would be financed as Second and Third Houses are—primarily through support stipends paid by welfare departments, private agencies, or parents.

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SAJA, as an experiment in people living and working together in providing alternatives to traditional ways of dealing with social problems, has great potential. However, none of us knows where it will lead. We do not know how long such a collective effort can be maintained, although the continual infusion of new personalities and our selective hiring procedures should contribute to its long-term success. We do not know how large we can grow—how many more projects can be included in the collective before things become unwieldy. So far, we have been able to work pragmatically, meeting problems and dealing with them, growing and changing as we go along. Perhaps when things get too big, groups of projects will split off and form separate organizations. SAJA is people. What happens with SAJA in the future depends upon the people in it, their interests, their abilities, their personalities, and their commitments.

## CHAPTER II. RUNAWAY HOUSE

Runaway young people have long hair, wear bell-bottomed jeans, watch television, and have problems at home and at school—just like other kids. Their response to these problems—running—is one way of coping with a situation that is for some reason intolerable. Other young people may have other means of coping with similar problems, or other ways of acting them out. Estimates of the number of kids running away each year go as high as 1,000,000.

Take a random sampling of the kids who run away from home and you will see a cross section of American young people. Some are mature, know how to take care of themselves, and leave home as the only reasonable alternative to the problems there. Others have problems that must be dealt with, but are not ready to care for themselves, having neither the information nor the skills to do so. These kids need and want to return to a family setting, eventually. Still other runaway young people are severely disturbed, having left a physically or psychologically brutal home, guided only by an instinct for survival.

Runaways cannot be stereotyped by appearance or personality. They are not all hippie types, nor do they all have extensive experience with drugs. Many young people who run away are leaving home for the first time. Many are unacquainted with the street and drug scenes. A number of these kids are from strict military families or demanding, religious backgrounds, who have run away in order to assert their own identities. Some are unbelievably straight and naive, isolated from what is going on in the rest of the world in spite of the news media and television. Other runaways are tough. These young people have lived through all kinds of brutality and perversion and have developed a highly defensive exterior as a means of survival.

Many of these kids are frustratingly adolescent—the same people one would run into teaching in a junior high school. Friendships are made, and hearts are broken, easily. Most of them have never had to think for themselves or to be responsible for themselves. Perhaps as many kids run away from homes in which they are stifled by love ("being taken care of") as from indifferent or cruel homes. Because they have never made realistic decisions for themselves, runaways' plans are often just daydreams. "Oh, I'm either going to Florida or I'll live with my aunt." "I'm going to Canada. They can't bust you in Canada, can they?"

Like a lot of kids of the same age, many runaways are young/old. They are struggling to define their own identities—trying on roles and different ways of relating to people as if they were trying on hats. Behind the heavy makeup or the shadowy mustache is often a child, who is growing up, yet still needs love, a home, and limits around him. Many of these kids seem bored with the world around them. Many leave home because there is little stimulus in the suburbs—just a pre-cooked high school education and doing dope at the local shopping center for entertainment. These runaways, seeing someone laughing and playing naturally, may say, "Hey, man—are you stoned?"

The initiated can quickly spot a group of runaways on the street. They move like illegal immigrants who just sneaked into the country. These kids are on guard, and get ready to run at the sight of a beat cop or a patrol car slowly rounding a corner. Each runaway seems to think that every street corner policeman has memorized his missing person's report and has just finished talking to his mother.

A new runaway at the door of the Runaway House may be timid, questioning, and radiating distrust, or he may be bold, expecting to be allowed to crash at the house with no limits on his behavior or length of stay. He arrives with a duffel bag, a guitar, or a knapsack—although some kids show up with trunks, stereos, radios, puppies, and kittens. "They told me this was the Runaway House and that I could crash here . . . ?"

The runaway often shows spunk and determination in the midst of the crisis and confusion in his life. He may have hitchhiked hundreds of miles across the country, alone. He probably left home with no plans, little money and few belongings, yet soon learns to spot strangers who will help him out. Although life on the streets is rough, he is willing to risk it rather than return to an unchanged situation at home. "I don't know what I'm going to do, but I can't stand to be at home when they fight all the time."

For all his courage in having left home, a runaway is usually afraid of being caught, or turned in, and it takes time to build trust. "You won't call my parents; you won't tell them I'm here?" Slowly his story unravels, usually showing problems that are very real although they vary in degree with each individual. He may also show pain, confusion and real fear. Some kids are really paranoid. "I think that guy's a narc." "Why are those cops standing across the street all the time?"

It often takes a day or so for a runaway to trust the setup and the people at the Runaway House. The other kids have a lot to do with this as they bring the new runaway into the group—sharing information about themselves and what they are trying to get together with the help of the house workers.

It also takes some time for reality to hit the runaway squarely in the face. Scrounging money for food usually involves panhandling from people on the street or searching for odd jobs. It takes time to find out that panhandling is degrading and that work is hard to find. It takes time to discover that it is all right to be 14 and to need people and to need help—and to need a home. One has to learn that problems can be defined and dealt with—something the runaway has obviously not learned at home. One has to find out that being on your own can feel a lot like being alone.

The majority of runaways do eventually go home, whether they happen to go to a runaway shelter/counseling center or not. Many are arrested and carted home by the police. Often runaways find themselves entangled with the juvenile courts and probation departments because of runaway busts. However, the potential for a second or third attempt at running away remains if the problems in the home have not been recognized by the members of the family and if the situation stays the same. The Runaway House staff supports the runaway in breaking this cycle of returning home and running away again by helping him to define the problems at home and to work out alternatives in dealing with the situation. Usually this involves an attempt at resolution with the parents, although some young people leave truly destructive homes and must look elsewhere for a healthy living situation.

Most of the kids who show up at Runaway House are initially looking for a place to crash. "... have to get some money together before I split for Florida." During his first few days as a runaway, a young person may not recognize a need for counseling and viable alternatives, but he knows he needs a place to stay! So we strike a bargain with the runaway. We agree to provide him a secure place to live for a few days if he agrees to think about the problems from which he ran and to try to come up with reasonable alternatives which will change his present living situation.

We make this agreement with each young person entering the house. The agreement is vital to our working with the individual and stems from our belief that each runaway must take responsibility for his or her own life.

If he agrees to his part of the bargain, we provide what the runaway, due to his legal situation, is unable to obtain: shelter, lots of information, and counseling. We try to make our expectations for the runaway very clear and usually present them during the initial long rap with him soon after he comes to the house. In presenting the house rules, we explain the legal situation at the Runaway House: we are actually "illegally harboring minors." We point out the young person's responsibility in keeping the house from being closed down; i.e., no sex, drugs, or liquor for minors in the house. The runaway is to be in on time and to share responsibility for maintenance of the house.

We make it very clear to each runaway, first, that his own position is subject to police action, and secondly, that the operation of a runaway house may itself be technically illegal.

After a couple of days in the problem-solving atmosphere of RH, kids are usually ready to start testing options. However, if they want to keep on running, instead of working things out—as the I. Ching says, "No blame." They are asked to leave the house, and are assured that they can return to Runaway House if and when they are ready to try possible solutions to their problems.

Often kids need time on the streets to learn about jobs, apartments, and trips to California. They need to test their capabilities and perhaps to discover the need to be taken care of in a home-like situation. Many who leave Runaway House to try to make it on the streets, return for help, with a much better grip on reality.

## Background Information

The Runaway House evolved from ground work laid by Rev. Tom Murphy, a free-lance minister with D.C.'s Church of the Pilgrims near Dupont Circle. Murphy, whose roving ministry included the hippies and runaways of the Dupont Circle area, ran a coffee house called the Mustard Seed. Tom worked with many of the runaways who gravitated to the Dupont Circle freak community looking for action and places to crash. He housed some of these confused kids with his friends, but soon realized that the community needed a specific place for runaways to stay.

Bill Treanor, 24, was in D.C. during the spring of 1968

working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Poor People's Campaign and Resurrection City. Bill's checkered career included his own runaway episode at the age of 17, when he made it from New York City to California. He was busted, returned home, and joined the U.S. Army. While "seeing the world" with the Army, he first learned to wheel and deal, scrounging coffee for his intelligence unit. (Thirty pounds of coffee yielded him an extra day off.) Later, Treanor attended Georgetown University in D.C. for 2 years. The next couple of years he spent organizing for SCLC in the South and doing community work in the District of Columbia. In 1968, Bill was back in town for the Poor People's Campaign. He and Murphy met through a mutual friend and agreed to try to set up a house for runaways, which opened in June 1968.

The house for runaways was founded to meet a definite need: to give runaways a place to stay. Counseling procedures, house rules, and policies for dealing with parents and police evolved through experience. The house was founded because runaway teenagers were becoming involved in destructive sexual experiences and drugs while on the streets of D.C. and needed a safe place to stay while they were in the District.

Bill and Tom found a big, old, five-bedroom row house on 18th Street, two blocks from Dupont Circle. The realtor was a friend of theirs. The house was ideal because it had three floors with a bathroom on each of the two upper floors. The top floor was designated for the girls and women counselors' sleeping quarters; the men sleep on the second floor. The first floor has a large living room, a room-size foyer, a dining room, and kitchen. The house rents for only $385.00 a month including utilities. The first month's rent was covered by money donated by the D.C. Friends Church Council.

Mary Lee Munger, a seminary student on summer vacation, who had originally been hired to work at the Mustard Seed, agreed to work at the house for runaways, instead. She and Bill opened the house in June 1969. Murphy, who was still running the Mustard Seed, spent part of each evening at the runaway center, informally consulting with Treanor and Mary Lee, who had little experience working with runaways.

Originally, all runaways were to be sent to the Mustard Seed for an initial interview with Tom. However, this proved to be very difficult, logistically. As Bill and Mary Lee became experienced in working with runaways this practice was discontinued.

A $2,500 grant to the Mustard Seed for work with runaways covered the rent on the building after the first month. Mary Lee and the staff members that followed her during the first year of operation held part-time jobs to cover their food and personal expenses. Bill attended Federal City College, part-time, while living at RH and was able to live on the G.I. Bill. The house workers paid phone bills and other house expenses out of their own pockets. Nickel and dime donations came through periodically during the first 10 months, but the counselors primarily supported themselves.

At the outset, Bill and Tom made the decision that they were not going to require kids to get permission from their parents to stay at the house. They felt that the kids who really needed help would be too angry and confused to want to establish contact with their parents right after they came to the house. This policy meant that the house would probably come into conflict with many parents and sometimes the police. However, Treanor and Murphy decided to risk it, hoping that in any eventual court case they would be able to convince the judge that the house had to operate the way it did to be effective. It was widely known that runaways were a serious problem that no straight agency was able to deal with and that the police alone could not solve. Because of the serious need for someone to do something to help D.C.'s large population of teenage runaways, Bill and Tom hoped that the project would be tolerated by the police and the courts.

Treanor felt strongly that the house should operate underground for the first few months; it did not even have a name. Bill and Tom wanted to establish the house as a place for kids to stay. They hoped to make more contacts with influential people, favorably disposed to the project, before there was any publicity. They felt that publicity could only bring confrontation with the police and the government bureaucracy before the fledgling project was well enough established to fight back. Bill and Tom did not go to anyone to ask permission to house runaways, since the answer could only be "No."

## Thoughts on Why It Worked

You must carefully weigh the ramifications of publicity when starting a counter-culture youth project. Will publicity bring in money and community support as well as more kids to work with? Or will it quickly bring

about the death of the project? If you decide to hold back on publicity, you can still get to know some reporters so that you can get publicity when you want it. Such friends can also publicize police hassles or movements to close down your program. However, make sure that any media people you give information to are really your friends. And, make sure that they get the story straight!

Treanor and Murphy did assemble a group of people from the Dupont Circle community in case they needed to say that the house had a board of directors. These people had no real power. They loaned their names to the "Board" in support of the project and were willing to help in a crisis. The Runaway House, and later SAJA, has never had a functioning board of directors. The project has always been governed by the people working in it.

After almost 4 years of operating, we can see that Runaway House took advantage of the peculiar institution that is the District of Columbia. The unresponsiveness of a presidentially appointed and congressionally controlled Government permits a certain amount of tolerance for counter-cultural programs. It is difficult for the D.C. Government to move quickly and do something about stopping a project. The local government is primarily concerned (and rightly so) with black people and programs for black kids. We are working primarily with white, suburban kids. We get no financial support from the city, but this lack of concern allows us to exist. Most of the runaways we work with are from D.C.'s Maryland and Virginia suburbs, which places them under out-of-state missing persons bureaus and court jurisdictions. Getting a District search warrant for an out-of-state runaway involves such a morass of red tape that few people ever come up with one.

We were able to stand firm on the "no information" issue with parents and police, because of the D.C. Government and geographical situation and because Bill and Tom had extensive political contacts in the city. It is pointless to go into a blow-by-blow on how they out-flanked the police, but we will offer a few observations.

When you are looking for property to house the project, make sure that the landlord is tolerant, if not sympathetic, of what you are trying to do. If the landlord can be pressured by police, neighborhood home-owners, or other forces in the community, into not renting to you any longer, no one will have to try to shut you down with some legal maneuver.

Whatever contacts you have in important places should be briefed on what is happening with the project so that they can step in on your behalf if they get wind of trouble. (At one point a friend of ours in the Deputy Mayor's office heard about our hassles with housing inspectors and, on his own, got the Deputy Mayor to intervene.) You should feel out the sympathies of the police. Will they be glad to have the runaway problem taken out of their hands or will they try to shut your project down? Have you any chance of maintaining anonymity long enough to become established and community supported before a police confrontation?

Consider opening a project in the city instead of the suburbs. City people tend to be much more tolerant of strangers and of weird people wandering around their neighborhoods than are suburban people. There are also usually more buildings available for rent in the cities. You may also find fewer hassles with zoning boards, housing inspectors, etc.

Because of the reputations of Huckleberry's in San Francisco, Project Place in Boston, our project, and others, the idea of a runaway shelter/counseling center has some credibility that it did not have 4 years ago when we started. There are runaway programs springing up all across the country; some are even run by city governments. Therefore people starting runaway youth centers may not have to start at the rock bottom, with little community support and recognition, as we did.

None of SAJA's programs have been based on police statistics or sociological surveys. Every project that we have organized has evolved from a need seen through work in the community. "Solutions" artificially imposed from outside the community have little chance of success.

Tom Murphy and Bill Treanor were both well acquainted with the Dupont Circle area. They also shared extensive community organizing experience and personal contacts with local politicians and community leaders. Tom's clerical collar also lent some legitimacy to the operation and helped when the house had to deal with parents and police.

Contacts are made all the time through participation in the local community, although some may seem far afield. Each minister you meet at a conference has a congregation behind him which might be willing to donate money to your project. A newspaper reporter can be befriended at a party. The man at the corner grocery might donate day-old bread to you. The woman for whom you campaign for the school board may be

able to help you get a kid into high school later. If you are working on a good project, people don't mind being asked for support or help on a personal basis.

What if you are not into making community contacts and playing politics in such a way that the system works for you? Do the members of your group want to work just with young people? Do they become frustrated by having to deal with bureaucracies? If so, find someone who does enjoy community contact and playing politics. He can serve as a buffer between the group of people working in the project and the police, the Government, and the community people who must be dealt with somehow as the project grows in strength and influence.

We feel that alternative youth services must have quite a bit of independence. This means that the group involved must be able to fund the project, must be able to resolve internal conflicts, must keep the law at arm's length, and must not get hung up with demands from outside bureaucracies which divert attention and energy from the actual project. The SAJA collective has found it necessary to delegate these responsibilities to two administrators who are willing to be front men to the rest of the community. They serve as buffers so that the rest of us can get on with working with kids. This also helps the organization deal decisively with bureaucracies with a minimum of contradiction and confusion. These administrative positions demand people that the staff can respect and trust to work in the interest of the entire collective.

Treanor handled much of these contacts while he lived at RH. He moved into an exclusive coordinator role when he moved out of the house and started organizing and funding Second House. We finally hired a second administrator to share this buffer/coordinator role in the fall of 1970. These workers deal with realtors, police bureaucracies, funding sources, agencies and referrals, handle the books, etc.

## Working With Runaways

Working with runaways boils down to helping a person, often accustomed to running from problems, to sit down and grapple with them. It means helping him to come up with solutions that he will be comfortable with so he will not have to run again.

A counselor is the advocate of reality. He has information on alternatives for runaways and skills at helping kids set up good living situations. The worker also gives emotional support to these young people. He has to be able to think on his feet as situations and kids' feelings change rapidly. The counselor is usually working against time, hoping to help a runaway get something together before he is busted, or becomes disillusioned with the whole process. He must be very perceptive. Each new runaway is different; each presents a unique set of problems. The counselor starts at rock bottom with each new kid.

The questions you ask during the first couple of raps you have with a runaway can gently, subtly give you the information you need to start developing alternatives for the young person. If you are skillful, you can lead a runaway through the information that you need to know without his feeling that he is being grilled. Practice listening very closely and learn to hang onto all the information in your head. It helps to sit down every night and write up the information gleaned each day on each runaway. Then you have it for present and future reference. This is helpful if the runaway goes home and splits again. He will think that you are brilliant if you remember his story from 6 months before!

We kept no records on kids for about the first 10 months that the house was open. We finally started keeping a form on each runaway for our own information and for the kids' protection. We don't have a long, involved information form, but do feel that it is vital to have background information (which is confidential) written down soon after the runaway arrives at the house. This is necessary for emergency situations. (We have only used this information when trying to get kids into hospitals. Most hospitals will not treat a young person without the parents' consent.) There may be some problem with kids' lying on their forms the first day, but these few usually come clean once they learn they can trust us. (A copy of our form is included at the end of this chapter.)

Believing that most adolescents are capable of determining for themselves what is best for them, the house workers try to maintain a supportive, problem-solving atmosphere which is more stable than the street but free enough to allow for responsible, independent decisions. The runaways help clean the house and refrain from drugs, liquor, and sex in the house. Aside from these rules the real demand on the runaway is that he use the relative peace of the house and the greater experience of the counselors to try to understand the reasons for his running away and to develop a practical plan of action for the future. (Runaway House rules are included at the end of this chapter.)

## Runaway House

As kids were referred to the house on 18th Street by the Mustard Seed and by word of mouth on the street, the names "Halfway House" or "Runaway House" were often used. Runaway House finally stuck. There has never been a sign to distinguish RH from the other three story, grey stone, row houses on the block. Kids can find the house by asking people in the neighborhood, or by consulting a hotline, or an underground newspaper.

## The Runaways

Since June of 1968, over 3,000 runaways between the ages of 10 and 17 have stayed at the Runaway House. We are now housing about 100 young people each month. These kids come from every social class, religion, and section of the country, although over 60 percent are from the D.C. metropolitan area.

Runaways' problems range from fights with their parents over hair, clothes and friends, to incredibly brutal, dangerous living situations. It is very difficult to categorize these young people's situations for the purpose of description, yet groupings do form around the seriousness of the problems and the possibilities for alternative solutions. We have found that there are:

- –Kids who have problems but who can work out a return to their families, eventually.
- –Young people, including kids that no one wants, society's throw-aways, whose problems at home are so severe that another living situation must be sought.
- –Kids in trouble with the law for offenses other than running away, for example, escapees from reform schools and mental hospitals.
- –Kids from any of the above situations who will be O.K. living on their own.

## Kids Who Can Go Home

About 75 percent of the runaways who come through the Runaway House eventually go home. The vast majority of these kids do have problems at home, ranging from hair-cutting hassles to heavy confrontations on basic beliefs and lifestyles. However, these young people have a chance to work things out with their parents. Each stays at the house for an average of 3 to 4 days, although some have taken as long as a month to resolve a liveable situation at home. Each talks with the Runaway House workers about what has been happening in the home and how she can work with her parents to change the situation.

A lot of kids who run away from home do not have a clear idea of the problems from which they are running. Therefore, they are unable to communicate to their parents their reasons for running away in the notes that may be left behind. We let the runaway ventilate her anger, but try to get her to really define the problem at home. "Can you get a handle on what really bothers you at home? . . . What has to change before you will go home? . . . Is what you are demanding realistic? . . . Do your parents really know why you left home? (The answer often is "No.") . . . Don't they have a right to know?"

We do not require that a runaway call his parents for permission to stay at the house, and we have no requirement that the runaway call home within a set period of time. However, we do expect most kids to contact their parents sometime during their stay at the house, to reopen communication with them. "Look, you don't have to tell your parents where you are, but you should let them know that you're O.K. You should probably tell them why you split, too, so they can start thinking about what they are going to do about all these hassles. You can also find out whether or not they have called the cops . . . ."

If the runaway O.K.'s it, one of the RH workers listens on an extension phone when he calls home. This gives the counselor an understanding of the way the parents and their son or daughter relate to each other in a crisis. This information helps the worker in figuring out, with the runaway, what to do next.

A lot of kids are afraid to call home–afraid that their parents will talk them into going home. Often the first couple of calls home go something like: "Hi, Mom? This is Billy, I'm O.K." . . . click! "Mom, this is Billy again, just wanted you to know that I'm still O.K." . . . click! Sometimes it takes a while for the runaway to have enough confidence in himself to start a dialogue with his parents. We just keep talking to him, keep supporting him, and if the runaway is really procrastinating, may set a deadline. "O.K., you've been here for 2 days and have not tried to work anything out for yourself. If you are serious about dealing with your family, as you say you are, you will call home by this time tomorrow. At least start talking to your parents!"

Primarily through talking with the runaway, individually and in group sessions, we try to help the young person listen to himself. For example, "You've said, at different times, that you: (1) love your parents; (2) you don't want to hurt them; but (3) will not call them; and (4) will never go home. This is really confusing to me. Do you feel confused? . . . Is there any way these opposing feelings can be resolved?" or "Your mother is domineering and stubborn? What about you, and your refusal to compromise? Sounds like you are as stubborn as she is!"

Each runaway is unique and we respond to each person in a different way. Some are terribly frightened and need lots of emotional support. Others are incredibly bull-headed or infuriating procrastinators for whom we finally set "shape up or ship out" demands. Some kids are extremely confused and need a lot of a worker's support and attention in sorting things out. Other runaways are very aware of themselves and their own needs and work out their own problems with very little help from the RH workers.

The counselors' decisions about how to deal with a certain runaway are very subjective. It just comes down to what feels right in a given situation. Therefore, training, degrees, and background qualifications matter little when we are hiring staff. We look for people who can intuit others' feelings and needs, who can handle a wide variety of situations, and who enjoy bringing order out of chaos.

There is sometimes more to the problems at home than the runaway is able to express. It is the worker's job to help her to dig for what is really bugging her and put it into words. "My parents don't like my hair/clothes/friends" may mean that the young person feels that her parents do not like, need, or love her. She may have run away to find out whether her parents actually do care about her. If the runaway can articulate this to her parents, they may be able to develop a more supportive, expressive environment at home.

We try to help these runaways figure out to whom they can turn for help. "Is there anyone that both you and your parents trust? A teacher, neighbor, relative, minister, shrink, probation officer, social worker . . .? Would your parents trust us (the RH workers)?"

The outcome of these discussions and telephone calls home is often a family conference. This family conference usually leads to the young person's returning home. (See the section on family conferences.) Often the members of the family agree to seek further family counseling help. Other kids may just decide to go home and do so, without a conference, and sometimes without telling their parents where they have been.

Since we have no followup procedures at this time, we have little information about what generally happens when kids return home. We do know that many families fall back into their old patterns of relating to each other, because many kids run away again. (We have no statistical information on how many run away again.) The parents of a young person who has stayed at RH, often call to leave a message with us because their son or daughter has split again. Many families do not follow through on their intention to participate in family counseling. Many cannot afford private therapy and public mental health agencies often have long waiting lists for their low-cost counseling services. We hope to get together a family counseling service, involving ex-Runaway House staff and other qualified people, to have something immediate to offer those families who say they do want further counseling.

## Kids Who Can't Go Home

As we meet each runaway, we usually start out with the assumption that he can work something out with his parents and can return to the family. However, as we gather more information from the individual we may find that returning home may not be best for the runaway—at times it is out of the question.

"—How many times have you run away?"

"This is the fourth time this year. The last time I got busted and my parents had the court put me on probation. They said that if I ran away again they'd have me sent up."

"—What happened when the police took you home the last time?"

"My father beat me and threatened to have me sent up . . . ."

"—Has anyone ever tried to get outside help for the family?"

"My probation officer tried to get my parents to do family counseling, but they said it's all my fault—I have to learn to live their way and like it."

"—How do your parents get along?"

"He's not my real father, my real father died when I was 7. My mother is afraid of him; he gets drunk all the time. I tried to get her to leave, but she won't because of the kids."

We usually ask these kids to call home to find out what the parents are doing about their son or daughter's running away. (We make no demand that they say where they are.) We get the individual's O.K. to listen in, so we can check out his dead-end interpretation of the situation. There seem to be a couple of general reactions from the parents in these destructive situations. Some parents just do not want the kid at home any more and tell him not to come back. We have worked with many kids as young as 14 who have been kicked out of their homes. Other parents, no matter how bad the situation, still want to control "their" child. This may mean forcing him or her to return home using all kinds of threats or declaring the child incorrigible and having the courts send him to reform school. This happens to kids of all ages and from all social classes. (We worked with one girl who had been sent to reform school for running away from home at the age of eight.)

If the runaway's perception of the situation as unworkable appears to be correct, we start checking out alternatives while still trying to obtain more information about the family situation. Would her parents allow her to live somewhere else, or must the courts be involved to take the runaway from her parents' custody? Are there relatives—grandparents, aunts, uncles, older brothers and sisters—with whom the runaway could live? Has she already been involved with the courts? Does she have a probation officer, welfare worker, etc. who knows the family situation? Would this person be willing to help get the young person out of the home via the courts? Could a clergyman talk to the parents and convince them to let their child live elsewhere? Would it be possible to get the parents to declare the kid incorrigible, asking the courts to take over her custody (using their desire to have their child locked up)? When the case comes to court could we, through the probation officer, court worker or lawyer, offer the judge a more positive alternative for the young person?

We never try to involve a runaway with the courts unless we have everything set up beforehand. We are extremely cautious about this because we want to avoid any possibility of the young person being sent to reform school. We make sure that the runaway is willing to go through the risk and hassle of court involvement. We find a lawyer who will represent and support the runaway. We find a sympathetic worker in the court, a probation officer or intake worker who will back the alternative that we find for the runaway. We track down a healthy, alternative living situation (by far, the most difficult and time-consuming part of this process). We figure out how to get the case into court. The parents may petition the court to declare their child "out of parental control." We may be able to find a court worker or child welfare worker who will investigate the home and bring it to the attention of the court. Or the runaway may be busted, and refuse to return to her parents, which brings the case automatically to court. When possible, we try to ensure that the case will come before a nonpunitive, sympathetic judge.

To learn how to wend your way through the maze of your local jurisdictions, ask juvenile court lawyers, probation workers, court intake workers, and judges to meet with your staff. These people may also be willing to help out if kids you are working with become involved with the courts. Since most of the kids we work with come from the D.C. Metropolitan Area, we have to maintain such contacts in at least five jurisdictions (we sometimes work with outlying jurisdictions which would bring the number up to seven).

It is extremely difficult to find alternatives for many of these kids. Most people who want foster children are looking for young children, not teenagers with histories of running away. Some people who will accept teenagers into their homes are looking for built-in babysitters—a set up that doesn't do the young person any good.

Money is another problem. Some good families are willing to take kids but cannot afford to support them. Welfare foster support stipends are often insufficient and welfare departments often have absurd licensing requirements for foster families. So kids sit in crowded detention homes and other institutions while the welfare department quibbles about the number of square feet per bedroom in a private foster home.

It is important to familiarize yourself with the alternatives that are available to these young people. You must know the court system. Find out how to get lawyers for the kids. Know what private agencies in the area are doing foster placement. Perhaps they will place kids for you in private or group homes so that you do not have to deal with obtaining a foster placement license if one is required by your jurisdiction. Know the welfare department's procedure for placing foster kids. Know the good boarding schools in the area. This is one way to get a young person out of the home. Know what psychiatric facilities are available for kids in need of such a placement.

There are so few alternatives for the kids nobody wants—America's throwaway children. Therefore, people

working in youth projects find that they must create their own. We receive many requests for information about our projects from people around the country. Several counter-cultural youth service organizations are setting up group homes and foster placement programs. Established agencies are becoming aware of the success of such noninstitutionalized approaches to working with young people. Traditional agencies and representatives of several city governments have contacted us for information about noninstitutionalized alternatives for kids. Counter-cultural youth service programs can spearhead change in their local communities by showing that many kids with problems can be helped within the community. They do not have to be shipped away and institutionalized.

It often takes weeks, even months, to come up with an alternative living situation for a runaway. This causes problems for the Runaway House. During the first year and a half that the house was open, several kids stayed for many months—one girl for a year—because there were no alternatives for them. It is very easy for a runaway center to let these kids stay. However, if the house fills up with long-term kids, it loses the crisis-intervention atmosphere and becomes more of a residential center. This interferes with work with short-term runaways. We opened Second House, our first group home, originally to provide a place for more long-term runaways to stay. As you will read in the group foster home chapter, the group homes have evolved away from this purpose, so we are planning to open another Runaway House. This house would probably handle longer-term kids sent over from Runaway House I.

There may be four or five long-term kids among the group of 15 or 20 young people staying at the Runaway House. This can cause problems with the runaways who can or should work things out with their parents. These young people do not see why they should move on since the long-terms get to stay. Things are not as cool for the long-term runaway as other kids think they are. Kids who stay at the Runaway House for a long time are continually forming close friendships with new people who come in, and then their close friends leave again.

The house population is very transient and tends to be pretty noisy. The kids sleep in dormitory type rooms; there is little privacy. A young person who stays at RH for a long time may feel lost in the shuffle as the workers are continually spending more time with the new kids. He may not get the personal attention that he needs and deserves. If this happens, he may start causing trouble to get people to pay attention to him.

While other runaways are actively working something out with their parents and spend a lot of time talking with the workers and using the groups as a medium for sorting things out, the long-term runaway must mark time. He knows what he wants to do and must just stick things out until that elusive alternative turns up. Each day he may call his caseworker or P.O. to find out if anything has been found, but is usually told to wait some more. We try to get the long-term runaway to structure his time somehow to lessen the chances of his getting into trouble or being bored to tears. Often these kids get jobs through the SAJA Job Co-op.

The runaway counseling center that must require parental permission to work with a young person may see few kids who come from really destructive homes. These runaways are too frightened to contact their parents and would rather risk running. However, you might reach some of these kids if you let it be known, via the underground, that you will work with kids who are unwilling to contact their parents but will not house them. At the same time make it clear to all interested parties (like the police) that you will not apprehend or detain any runaways for them, nor will you give out information about runaways who have contacted you but have decided not to stay at your place because of the parental permission thing.

## Kids in Trouble With the Law

We have worked with kids on the run from reform schools, from commitment in mental hospitals, from drug possession charges—even a couple of young people wanted for murder. These kids feel able to approach Runaway House because we do not require permission for them to stay with us. Runaway centers which must require legal permission to house runaways will work with few of these young people.

It should be recognized that this practice might come under the legal definition of "harboring fugitive minors," but again, we have seen no alternatives strictly within the law to providing this service.

There is little that we can do, however, for kids who are already in trouble with the law. Many do not belong in reform schools or mental hospitals at all. They were placed there due to a lack of alternatives or because they had no one to go to bat for them. However, by running,

they have made things worse for themselves. The risk involved in seeking help is very high for such a runaway. The possibility that he will be incarcerated for a longer term because of his running away is overwhelming to the young person. Contacting a probation officer or hospital caseworker in the hope that a more positive alternative can be worked out is such a slim chance! Many of these kids are so frightened and feel that their situations are so hopeless that they decide not to try to search for alternatives and just keep running.

Kids who have run from mental hospitals, especially State hospitals have often been propped up on "therapeutic" drugs for so long that they go into drug withdrawal after a couple of days away from the hospital. These kids contact the hospital and ask to go back because they cannot operate without the support of the drugs. This is a terrible process for us to watch, yet there is little we can do to help. The most that we can do is to talk with the runaway's shrink or social worker at the hospital. Hopefully he will work out a better program for the young person. We can also talk to the runaway's parents and try to convince them to find better help for their son or daughter. (This is done only with the kid's permission.) This is just talking. There is little action that we can take in such a situation.

Once in a while, a runaway comes through the house who is obviously too emotionally disturbed and/or self-destructive to function within the Runaway House, let alone in the streets. We can usually convince these kids that they need more help than we can give them and they either return to the mental hospital from which they ran or we help set up a psychiatric placement. On a few occasions involving very suicidal or dangerously violent kids, we have taken over and temporarily placed runaways in psychiatric facilities until long-term help could be found for them. We work closely with our psychiatric consultants in these situations.

Sometimes we are able to act as youth advocates for kids on the run from reform schools or drug busts. We can help the runaway contact his lawyer, case worker, or probation officer to try to work out a better deal for the young person. Again, this usually involves our doing the legwork and coming up with an alternative, which must satisfy both the court and the needs of the runaway.

Because of the fear and distrust that many of these runaways feel—fear of a system that has betrayed them once already—many of these kids stay on the streets. Often they are busted and reinstitutionalized, with nowhere to turn for help.

## Kids O. K. on Their Own

Every once in a while, a 16 or 17 year old boy or girl comes through the house who is competent to take care of himself and to live on his own. This young person may have developed such resourcefulness at an early age because no one at home cared about him and he had to learn to take care of himself. Or he may have been raised in a really fine home where he was taught to be responsible and then a death and remarriage in the family, for example, may have changed the home situation drastically, forcing him to leave.

Other kids have to try to make it on their own because of untenable legal situations. A 17-year-old reform school escapee who, if caught, may be required to stay behind bars until she is 21, may opt for the risk of living outside the law until her 21st birthday. This is difficult, but not impossible. Some young people who are not emotionally disturbed are committed to mental hospitals by their parents after they have run away from home. This is an upper-middle-class means of dumping the family problem on the young person—defining him as "crazy" and shipping him off to a mental hospital. Some of these kids leave the hospital and are able to live quite well, supporting themselves, if they are old enough.

Few young people under the age of 16 are able to get jobs, find a place to live, and support themselves. Few people under the age of 16 should have to. Most young people under 16 want some kind of supportive, home-like situation if they cannot live at home—a foster home, a group home, etc. Most kids under 16 are just too young—and look too young—to make it alone.

In the first place, a runaway has very little information about how to live on his own. He usually knows nothing about Social Security numbers, working papers, apartment rental, electric bills, etc. He finds it nearly impossible to enroll in a public high school without an adult pulling strings for him. The adult would probably have to lie, saying he is the young person's guardian, which could lead to legal trouble for the adult later. The runaway usually does not know how to budget his money or how to make it from one paycheck to the next. He may not even know how to cook his own meals, do his own laundry, or sew on his own buttons!

This young person has a lot working against him. He

has to remain outside the law until his 18th birthday, which makes it very difficult for him to find a job and a place to live. Many people are unwilling to have anything to do with a runaway teenager out of fear of "contributing to delinquency" charges. Many cities require that people under age obtain working permits. This is virtually impossible for a kid on the run, unless someone will help him obtain identification and working papers illegally. Otherwise he must find an employer who will hire him on the sly. Such employers often hire runaways so that they can pay extremely low wages and exploit the young people as much as possible.

Finding a place to live is extremely difficult. The runaway is not of legal age, therefore, he will find it impossible to sign an apartment lease without an adult to cosign. Landlords don't want to rent to young people because they cannot legally be held to a lease. Often young people don't know how to take care of the place in which they live. Kids have a reputation for turning their apartments into noisy, crowded crash pads. Rooming and boarding houses are usually expensive rip-offs and because of his legal situation the runaway has no recourse against abuses by his landlord. People over the age of 18 and members of communes are often leery of sharing living quarters with a runaway, because they do not want to be caught "harboring a minor."

Because of his status outside the law, often the only people who will associate with the runaway are also hiding from the police for one reason or another. This opens broad avenues of trouble to the runaway—opportunities to become involved in stealing, drug traffic, etc. Therefore, kids must be fairly independent and not easily railroaded into other people's pathologies to be able to take care of themselves in a healthy manner.

A girl has a more difficult time making it on her own. A runaway girl can easily become involved with men looking for a "housekeeper"—and soon discovers that sleeping with her employers is included in her housekeeping duties. She is also prey to drug pushers and pimps, who may try to hook her on heroin to tie her to a prostitution ring. While it may be easier for a runaway girl to stay on the run—there are so many men willing to "help" her—she has an even more difficult time finding a legitimate job and a nonexploitive place to live than does the male runaway. Landlords and employers are extremely reluctant to deal with a female runaway and she must continually make sure that those people who do offer help do not have predatory motives.

When we run into a young person who is able to and, for some reason, must live on his own, we try to support him in finding a job and a place to live. The counselor's role is to help the young person realistically understand what he is up against. (It is the worker's responsibility to know what problems a young person trying to live on his own will run into in the city in which the project is located.) The staff member must support the runaway without "taking care" of him or setting things up for him. Such a runaway is usually allowed to stay at the Runaway House for a short period of time, but is encouraged to find another place to live and a job as quickly as possible so that he will not have to be dependent on the house. Our Job-Finding Co-op is often able to help such runaways find employment and we hope to establish a Housing Cooperative soon, so that people under 21 will receive help in finding non-exploitive places to live.

We try to help the young person find a way that he can legally live on his own. For example, if his parents have kicked him out of the house, and have said that they do not want him to come back, he may be able to get them to sign a notarized statement that he has their permission to be living on his own. Once in a great while the juvenile court will "emancipate" a 16 or 17 year old. This process assures him that he has the rights of an 18 year old and will not be subject to laws that require that those under 18 be supervised by their parents. However, it is usually difficult for a young person to get such parental permission, or court emancipation, and most kids must live on their own illegally.

We encourage few kids to try to make it alone. We support only those runaways who are old enough and appear mature enough to have a good chance at success. We encourage only those who either have no alternative, or have a very strong will, as well as the ability, to take care of themselves.

Many kids come to Runaway House saying they are never going home and want to "get a job and an apartment." But most of them are on a different trip from those actually ready to start organizing their lives and taking care of themselves. These young people refuse to deal with the alternatives available to them and just want to keep on running, living on the streets, and crashing where they can.

After attempting to impress upon these kids what they are up against, we turn them loose, saying, "O.K., if you want to keep on running and living on the streets, you might as well start now. This is not a crash pad. Good

luck." This policy may seem harsh to people into helping young people, but each of these runaways must discover for himself how rough the reality of the streets is before he is ready to start looking for alternatives. Many of these kids return to Runaway House—admitting that they don't like the life of a runaway and are ready to start sorting out options for change in their lives.

## Family Conferences

Each step in the counseling process at RH has evolved from demands within the counseling situation. Early in the game, kids who decided to go home requested help in dealing with the initial contact with their parents, so we developed family conferences. We also do impromptu family counseling following unnerving scenes when either the parents somehow get into the house (door left unlocked), or some other conditions force a confrontation.

We never give out information about the people in the house. However, this infrequently backfires—as in the case of kids who surreptitiously let their parents know that they are at RH, though at the same time we may be at the front door refusing to tell the parents anything about their child. These kids invariably want to go home very badly but are unwilling to lose face by admitting it. They set up a confrontation in which the issue is forced. For example:

> Walter's parents showed up at the front door one night, extremely angry, demanding to know if their 13-year-old son was there. They returned in less than 10 minutes with 12 policemen. It took over an hour to handle the confrontation and to get them to go away. (They were not sure that he was at RH.) This was accomplished amid threats of arrest, etc. We maintained our refusal to give out information and would not allow the police or parents in without a warrant. They left to get one.
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> Meanwhile, Walter sent a note to his parents through a friend, telling them that he would not go home but that they should send him money at the Runaway House. His parents returned to the house (accompanied by a police captain) and showed us their proof that Walter was at RH.
>
> While one counselor kept the parents and police occupied on the front porch, we collared Walter and told him that his game was over. He had told his parents where he was (we did not) so he had to deal with them.
>
> This led to a late night family conference. Walter agreed to go home with his godfather, who had come with the parents. Walter came back to visit a week later and said that things were O.K.; he was glad to be home. He should have been—he set the whole thing up!

Fortunately, most family conferences come about under more controlled circumstances. Runaways who have contacted their parents arrange a time for the parents to come to the house to talk things out. Again, while we demand that kids work on their problems, we do not demand the family conference or the return home. The runaways make these decisions themselves, and they must take the initiative to arrange the family conferences.

We are not family counselors. We do not try to solve the problems that led to the runaway incident at one sitting. The family conference is an attempt to set up a situation in which the runaway is able to return home. We may try to arrive at an agreement between the young person and his parents under which he can live with relatives, go away to school, move into a foster home, or live on his own, if necessary. However, most family conferences have centered around the runaway's returning home, because that is what he wants.

The parents' view of us, the staff and Runaway House itself, greatly influences these conferences. If the parents are hostile toward us, and whatever they may think we stand for, these family sessions can be extremely difficult. It is vital that the counselor acting as mediator be trusted by both the runaway and the parents. Therefore, we sometimes bring in other people to participate in particularly difficult family conferences (with the O.K. of the young person involved). For example, we know a really together nun—whom kids trust immediately upon meeting her—who sometimes helps us with counseling strict Catholic families. The parents may be willing to trust her—and us in association with her—although they would have nothing to do with us before she came into the picture. Other people who may be able to help out with difficult conferences are ministers, rabbis, priests, professional social workers, hip psychiatrists and psychologists. If parents are turned off by the atmosphere (and the graffiti) at the House, we may hold the family conference elsewhere—in a church, for example.

Manipulating the environment for the family conference to make the setting as comfortable as possible for everyone involved is appropriate as long as the interests of the young person are maintained. If the parents would be threatened by counselors in jeans and

sandals, staff members can dress "straight" for the conference. The young person will understand this; he has been living with his parents for years! He knows what situations will offend his parents and can clue in the house workers. Then staff members and the runaway can decide what setup will encourage the most communication during the conference.

Before the conference, the counselors help the runaway clarify the things he needs to explain to his parents—why he ran away, how he feels about home and parents and what he wants in the future. It also helps immensely if the individual can determine what his contribution to the problems at home has been. In the process he can learn to accept responsibility for his actions. The staff can also help the runaway figure out what his parents are up to, and why. If the kid can see his parents as real human beings, with feelings, doubts, and problems of their own, he may be able to let down some of his barriers to communicating with them.

The purpose of the family conference is to promote communication among people who often have forgotten how to talk with each other. It is not the counselor's role to run the conference. They do not work things out with the parents for the runaway. They do not talk for the young person. The house workers support both the parents and the runaway in expressing feelings, opinions, and what each person feels his rights should be in the situation.

The counselors do not allow the discussion to be directed toward them. Often, parents, or the runaway, try to justify their actions to the counselors. "I restricted him because he . . ." "I ran away because they . . . ." The workers continually turn the discussion back to the family. "Tell your son why you are angry." "Tell your parents why you ran away."

The staff members are again the advocates of reality. "Something has to change if you don't want your daughter running away again." "You've got to give too, if you want your parents to change."

RH workers may comment on what they see happening and encourage people to talk about it. "Penny, you have been letting your parents talk about you as if you weren't in the room. You haven't said a thing; you look really sullen. Why?" "Andy, your mother is crying, how does that make you feel?" "Mrs. Smith, how did you feel when you found out that Sandy had run away? Did you feel anything more than the anger you are showing now?"

The counselors help people clarify what they are trying to say. "You say you want Tom to be more responsible, what does that mean to you? . . . Tom, what does being responsible mean to you?"

In heavily emotional situations, parents and kids tend to fall back into the games they played in the past—roles that probably contributed to the split between them in the first place. The workers can discuss these roles with the members of the family and try to get them to understand why they must play these games. "Mr. Collings, your argument doesn't seem to hold much water; what would happen if you just admitted you were wrong?" "Shelley, it seems that you are trying to set your parents up to be so angry that the problem will never really be discussed. Why?"

The ambivalences of child-rearing come into play. Many parents teach their kids to be independent, to think for themselves, and are then appalled when the product of such thinking produces disagreements on lifestyles, values, etc. Parents often want their kids to show maturity and responsibility, yet by governing their entire lives they refuse the young people these options. So the kids react to this hypocrisy by acting immaturely and irresponsibly.

Young people want freedom and the opportunity to experiment and to make mistakes, yet yearn for their parents' approval and support. If these conflicting desires can be verbalized and clarified during the conference, the individuals involved can come closer to understanding each other. Helping this evolve is the job of the workers.

The counselors must often put a lot of energy into keeping these sessions from deteriorating into battlefields for flinging accusations. This can best be accomplished by keeping the discussion present and future oriented. There is no point in going into past history and placing blame. The conference is used to define the family situation as it stands and to come up with future plans. Since the normal family setup has been disrupted by the young person's running away, this is the best time to discuss options for change. The parents may be much more receptive to suggestions for change because of the crisis situation in their lives. It is very important that all members of the family admit that there is a problem—a family problem. If the parents just want to repossess their child and see no need for change, you're in trouble. On the other hand, if the young person will not accept responsibility for his contribution to the situation, putting all the blame on

"them," it is difficult to arrive at any solution. Everyone must come around to seeing the problems as those of the family unit (this may include problems with other brothers and sisters). For example:

> Carol, age 14, had been acting pretty crazy at home and at school and had finally run away from home. She eventually set up a family conference. Although Carol had originally told us that she left home because her parents were too strict with her, it developed during the conference that most of her problems centered around her younger, adopted, brother.
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> The 11-year-old brother was severely emotionally disturbed and often acted violently. He commanded all of the parents' attention as they tried to keep him from hurting himself or a younger sister. Carol, herself, was afraid of the boy. She had also discovered that the only way she could get her parents' attention was to act crazy herself.
>
> The parents had not realized the effect that their adopted son's behavior was having on Carol. In the past they had demanded that she stop being childish and act like a mature, older sister toward the boy. During the conference they agreed to get professional help for their son and counseling for themselves and Carol to help rebuild their relationships.

Family conferences do not solve family problems. They are a means of working toward that end. Most of our family conferences wind up with an agreement among the members of the runaway's family that they will seek further counseling. The RH workers usually suggest agencies and private therapists from the family's home city if it is in the D.C. metropolitan area. Sometimes we even offer to contact an agency for them.

We've found that it is very helpful if the counselors can maintain contact with the runaway and his family after he has returned home. (This is very difficult for us to do because of the present work load and corresponding staff shortage.) It is important that the family receive support in actually following up on plans for further counseling. If the family does not actively work toward opening communication and changing the situation in the home, its members may fall back into their old roles after the crisis feeling has worn off. This sets the stage for another runaway incident. The family counseling service that we are developing will provide this followup and support.

It is vital for staff members to receive training in family counseling. The family conference is perhaps the most volatile of the counseling situations in a runaway house. In the family counseling situation, one must be able to think on one's feet. The information that comes out in the family conference may show that the runaway's version of the situation was entirely false. Counselors must be able to handle this. They must also be able to deal with anger, hostility, and emotional outbursts. The workers, as mediators, must be able to stay on top of what is happening with the three people confronting each other, and must not get caught up in the emotions of the situation. These situations require trained and experienced workers.

Training in family counseling may be found in universities or from professional family counselors who are willing to volunteer as consultants. It is especially productive if staff members can observe family counseling sessions run by a professional. One of our consultants, a social worker with Jewish Social Services who contributes 2 days a week to the Runaway House, often participates in our family conferences.

Family conferences are extremely difficult and it is impossible to determine their "success." This can often be a bummer for the staff people involved. However, sensitively handled discussions, which aim at clarifying problems and developing alternatives for future counseling can be useful to the runaway and can help him ease more comfortably back into the home situation.

## Groups

Group sessions at the Runaway House evolved from house meetings. For the first year and a half, meetings of all the kids in the house were called only to deal with inhouse problems. For example, if people repeatedly failed to keep the house clean, we would call a meeting. Eventually, we learned that these meetings could be used not only to deal with RH problems, but also as forums in which the kids could give each other help in working out their individual problems. We also found that daily group discussion sessions helped to mold a cohesive house group—which we could more easily manage.

We learned group directing skills from one of our consultants who is an excellent group therapist. However, while working with her, we got carried away on a therapy trip, as nonprofessionals working with groups. Although this was not particularly destructive in the short-term situation of the Runaway House, in the long run, it was not productive and actually got in the way of the work at the House. (It was a very bad idea in the group homes. See the foster home chapter.)

In a short-term, crisis-intervention situation, there is neither the time nor the secure environment necessary for delving into a person's emotional history, his games, and his defenses. The best one can do is to deal honestly with the individual in the existing situation. If you feel that the games a runaway is playing with his family obstruct his dealing effectively with the problems at hand, tell him so. But confront him as a friend, frustrated by his behavior, not as a therapist who will spend hours, in and out of group, on the historical origins of his behavior. The problem-solving approach seems to work best in the crisis-intervention counseling situation. There just is not time in the transient group setting of a runaway center to do extensive "therapy" with individuals. This takes too much time away from the other kids.

A person who is very highly defensive, or who is heavily involved in playing pathological games, does so for a reason. He has developed these mechanisms to survive in the environment in which he has been living. It is extremely dangerous to meddle with these defenses to any depth. Recommend therapy; know people who can help. Have names of trained therapists whom you can call if a runaway freaks out. But do not do therapy numbers on a kid, or with a group, unless you are thoroughly trained to handle any consequences.

Groups at the Runaway House are usually held in the morning, after clean-up so that everyone will be there. All the kids in the house are expected to attend group. Kids who often skip out on group find that their reasons for staying at the Runaway House are seriously questioned by both the staff and the other members of the group. Most of the young people who stay at the house develop a real interest and involvement in having daily groups.

These daily meetings provide continuity in the house—helping workers stay on top of what is happening with each individual. The information that comes out during morning groups often sets the stage for the rest of the day. Afternoons and evenings are spent working with runaways on the developments that have come out in group. Holding a group each day helps to maintain the problem-solving atmosphere of the house. The level of chaos rises if we allow several days to laps between groups. The place quickly becomes a circus. The percentage of kids who are "lost" rises when we let groups slip by. Groups are especially vital when there are 15 to 20 kids in the house. When there are so many young people, it is difficult for the counselors to compare notes on all runaways and some kids may get lost in the shuffle.

Eight to 10 people are the maximum for a workable group. When we have more than 10 people in the house we try to split up into two groups. The same people meet in a group with the same house worker during the time that they are at RH. New members enter one of these groups as they come into the house and then stick to that group for the duration. Sometimes we also hold men and women's groups. This is another way to cut down on numbers and also a good forum for discussion of more personal problems. These groups are also effective in dealing with any sexual games going on in the house; guys who pick up new runaway girls as soon as they come into the house, or girls who are acting out seductively.

We do hold large groups, which may include over 20 people, if most of the runaways are new to the house. In this way, they can get to know each other and can get a feeling for a large, cohesive house group. After about 20 minutes in the larger group, we split into smaller groups to work on individual problems.

It is awkward to put an individual on the spot by plunging into his problems at the outset of the group. "O.K., Billy, what is happening with you?" People will often get into a discussion of themselves more comfortably from an indirect route. For example, people can get to know each other better if the discussion starts with each one telling five things about himself. Name, age, hometown, and school attended are out, so the five things must be more information about the person himself. These descriptions often evolve into the runaway's talking about his situation at home with little prompting from the group.

A more general discussion can also get things rolling and easily moves on into talking about personal problems. For example, a conversation about responsibility to Runaway House and the people versus possession of dope in the house, can flow in many directions. It can lead to a discussion of responsibility to self and others, then turn into a conversation about individuals and their relationships with other people—and hence to a dialogue about the runaways' relationships with their parents.

In one of these flowing discussions, the worker involved does not necessarily run things, but he can pick up on points that he feels are important and can support other people in elaborating upon them. The counselor

must be aware of what he is saying. It is very easy to dominate the conversation yourself rather than to turn back to the group for elaboration and clarification of the issues being discussed. It is important to allow the will of the group to prevail in the flow of the conversation, but the worker can help to mold the conversation so that important points are not missed.

You can learn a lot about the runaways you are working with through group settings. Of course, a lot of factual information will be brought out as each person discusses his home situation. There are more subtle forms of information to be aware of too. For example, watch how individuals within the group interact with their peers. See who supports other members and who detracts from them. Watch for people who withdraw in groups. Learn which runaways cannot handle direct questions in the group setting; find other ways to draw them into the group. There may be times when a discussion of the actual dynamics of the group will be fruitful. "Hey, wait a minute, it looks like Joe is attacking Tom, and Sally is defending Tom, while Tom does not say anything. I don't see that this can go anywhere toward Tom working out his problems. Does anybody else see this as a setup?" or "I know that there is a lot going on with each person in this group, but no one seems to have anything to say. Maybe we should talk about what the group is for and how it can be used."

You don't have to wait for training to start groups in a runaway house; a lot of group techniques are not necessary. Initially the groups can be used for general discussion and for reviewing what is going on with individual runaways. Meanwhile find a consultant to work with you in reviewing the groups and the way you handle problems that arise in these daily meetings. He can help you improve your skills in dealing with groups on an ongoing basis. If you are in this line of work, you already know how to talk to people. You've probably been involved in all kinds of groups yourself—meetings, classes, etc.—so do not be intimidated by the idea of running a group.

Groups and group dynamics are often fascinating. A consultant on groups can help you to become aware of the various levels of interaction that take place in the house groups. The more subtleties that you are able to pick up, the more you will know about the people within the group.

When discussion centers around the runaways' individual problems, the workers often support the other kids in the group in helping the individual sort things out, rather than directing questions on a one-to-one basis to the runaway himself. "Tony, what do you think about Bill's decision to split for California?" (The counselor knows that one of Tony's runaway friends was arrested on his way to Florida.) Sometimes a runaway will become a respected "leader" in the house. He can often be supported by the house workers as an advocate of reality in group. His opinions may carry more weight than the counselors' because of peer relationships.

The workers may use role playing techniques. "O.K., Brenda, see if you can react as your mother would if you called home. I'll be your father and Sara will play you." Since the workers and the other kids have been living with this runaway, they can easily act his role. Often role playing can point out behavior that the runaway has shown which he is not aware of. These exchanges and mock telephone calls home can help the young person to understand his parents' feelings and actions. "Come on, Ted, how would you feel if someone called you and said he was angry at you and refused to tell you why?"

Groups can be directive or nondirective depending on what you want to do, the amount of time available, and your own personality. The nondirective method puts more responsibility upon group members themselves in helping each other deal with inhouse issues, contributing to kids' taking responsibility for the upkeep of the house, and maintenance of the rules. If house counselors are seen as members of the group, rather than directors of the group, the runaways may be able to bring up problems that they have with the staff and work these out in the group setting.

Placing responsibility on the group also cuts down on the workers' authoritarian role and counselor/kids, we/them confrontations.

"Hey, counselors! The other kids are ripping off my food."

". . . Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Uh, aren't you going to do anything?"

"—Seems to me you can handle it."

"Uh, O.K., guess I'll call a group."

Maintaining a cohesive group feeling helps to cut down on antisocial behavior—stealing, cliques, lying, and breaking rules. Using the group as a forum for dealing with such problems keeps people's authority hangups from coming between the workers and the runaways.

If the kids in the house feel that the group session is valuable, they may call groups themselves. Recently, runaways called a house group while a confrontation

with parents and police was underway on the front porch. They talked the frightened son of the parents at the door into meeting with his father, and then held a group that included the father. The kids supported, and confronted, both individuals. Father and son were able to clarify many of their differences and eventually left together that night, having agreed to seek further counseling.

Staff members can be trained in dealing with groups by consultants and through university courses. George Washington University, here in D.C., offered us a tuition-free undergraduate seminar as part of its community involvement program. The professor came to Runaway House 2 mornings a week during the summer term and we each received 3 hours of undergraduate credit. Staff members desiring graduate credit had to write a paper at the end of the course. We chose adolescent psychology as a general field of interest. However, such a course could cover more specific training in group work or family counseling.

It is helpful to have more than one consultant on group work. There is less tendency to fall into a specific theory of group technique and more opportunity for learning a variety of methods if different professionals are consulted. The more training you have had and the wider the variety of group skills you know, the more comfortable you will be in the group setting. And you will be more capable in handling whatever erupts during a group meeting.

## Consultants

At first, our use of consultants was very informal. Reverend Murphy, a professionally trained counselor, functioned as our counseling consultant. Professional volunteers in the counseling, legal, and medical fields, involved in Murphy's Mustard Seed coffee house, were sometimes called upon for help by the Runaway House staff. During this first year of operation, Bill Treanor met other professionals interested in the work done by Runaway House who volunteered to work with staff members on improving counseling skills and to consult on staff problems.

About a year after the house first opened, we began working with our first volunteer consultant on a regular basis. A psychiatrist in a children's hospital came to the house for an hour and a half on Mondays—primarily to talk about individual kids. He taught us to detach ourselves from difficult situations to realistically assess what we could actually do for individual runaways. We would often become emotionally involved with a young person—up to his ears in trouble—and would want to "make things better for him." Trying to work magic for someone can actually keep you from being able to help him at all.

This consultant taught us to figure out what we really could do, but even more importantly what we could not do, so that we would not make unrealistic promises to the runaway or to ourselves. We learned that we should not set expectations for ourselves that we could not fulfill—expectations that could only end in debilitating failures. He also taught us to have confidence in what we could do through Runaway House. With his support we were able to do a better job in dealing with courts and welfare departments and in setting up new living situations for kids. We were also more confident in handling confrontations with police, parents, and troublemaking kids.

As we became aware of the need for group sessions at Runaway House, we sought a second professional consultant. A couple of staff people met a psychiatric social worker at a Transactional Analysis (T.A.) (re: Eric Berne, *Games People Play*) conference whom we asked to train us in working with groups. This woman also worked with our staff, as a group, in ironing out intrastaff conflicts. She was an excellent group therapist, and taught us a lot about working with groups and about working as a group ourselves.

However, we became much too involved with her and too enamoured with her brand of Transactional Analysis. Five of the seven people on the SAJA staff (February through October, 1971) became involved in private therapy with this consultant and also joined her therapy groups. Having gotten into T.A. and this woman's emphasis on the historical origins of mental illness, we found all sorts of emotional problems within ourselves—in much the same way a high school student studying cancer is sure he has at least three varieties of the disease. The members of the staff spent a lot of time analyzing themselves, their relationships with other people, and the historical background of all their personal problems. Naturally, this carried over into the counseling situation, and we tried to use this woman's highly structured form of Transactional Analysis in working with kids. (This is discussed further in the group home chapter.) So for a while at RH, although the emphasis was still on problem solving, we spent too

much time delving into kids' emotional problems, family history, etc. We spent much more time rapping than actually doing things for kids.

Transactional Analysis itself is an interesting approach and has many valid theories. Our mistake was going overboard on this particular consultant's trip and in attempting to do "therapy" without appropriate training. We could have avoided much of this hassle if we had maintained a check-and-balance among volunteer consultants, working with people who adhered to different theories of counseling, and group work, therefore balancing the pressure from a particular type of therapy.

At the present time, three professional consultants work with the Runaway House. Each has a specific function. We receive support and recognition from the agencies employing these volunteer professionals. All of them are able to take time out from work to meet with us. A psychiatrist who has worked with R. D. Laing in England advises the Runaway House workers on counseling techniques and on working with individuals. A psychologist spends about 3 hours per week as a personal consultant for the house workers. He helps the staff members deal with the conflicts that arise among them, giving the workers support in expressing their feelings to each other. This is extremely important to the well-being of the staff members who must live and work together under the intense pressure of Runaway House. This psychologist works for a District of Columbia Mental Health Clinic. His work with SAJA is seen as part of the Clinic's community involvement.

A freak social worker with Jewish Social Services spends about 2 days each week at Runaway House working with the counselors and at times with individual kids. He observes the daily operation of the house and counseling sessions, providing the workers with feedback on the work they are doing. He is given the freedom by Jewish Social Services to do what he feels is most appropriate in community work. JSSA feels that some Jewish kids who will not be reached by traditional agencies can be helped by the Runaway House and therefore support us. (They also pay us $5.00 a night for each Jewish runaway who stays at the House.)

All of our professional consultants have been volunteers. We feel strongly that it is unnecessary for low-budget, nonprofessional youth projects to pay consultants. The money saved can be better used elsewhere. Since the Runaway House has become fairly well known over the past 4 years, many professionals approach us because they are interested in becoming involved in something less structured and more creative than their regular jobs.

Professional psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers will be willing to volunteer to consult with a paraprofessional project if it is innovative and exciting. It is important that you feel O.K. about asking professionals for help. If you are honest and together and your project is interesting, many professionals will jump at the chance to work with you. A consulting session need only last a couple of hours each week, so there does not have to be a huge time commitment.

You might want consultants to serve different functions. Some may offer specific training—for example, in group work, individual and family counseling. Others may work as personal consultants, helping to iron out staff problems. Some may provide support in regularly scheduled weekly meetings. Some may be called upon to run weekend training sessions, but may not be able to meet with you on a weekly basis.

We figure out what area of work in which we need support and then track down a professional who is willing to meet that need. The need comes first. There is no point in having a consultant just for consulting's sake—so that you have to conjure up things to talk about. (We've gone that route. It is terribly awkward.)

In tracking down consultants we depend on personal contacts, luck, and our reputation. We have found professionals, willing to work with us, among the universities and public and private mental health facilities in the city. Some we met as we were trying to get help on specific problems or for individual young people. Others we met through personal contact. Often after there is publicity about the project, we receive calls from professionals wanting to volunteer time. Publicity also helps when we approach professionals, for they have already heard about us. If necessary, we go out and find someone new, calling around and talking to people we know until we come up with the name of a professional who sounds qualified to help us fill a particular need. Then we approach him.

Know what you are looking for in a professional consultant. Don't waste time working with someone whom you do not trust, do not really need, or with whom you are not comfortable.

It is also important to try to find people who are comfortable in the informal setting of a paraprofessional youth project. It is really a pain in the neck to have to play professional protocol games with consultants. For

example, two of our psychiatric consultants once expressed a desire to meet each other. Yet it took nearly 10 days to get them together because each psychiatrist felt that the other should contact him first. We finally had to set up their meeting for them!

You may evolve through consultants. There may come a time when a consultant has taught you all he can teach you. Or you may discover that you no longer have anything to talk to him about. For example, our first consultant taught us to handle certain kinds of problems so well—his personal forte—that we no longer had these problems. For a couple of months we fumbled around during our consulting time with him trying to redefine his role and finally mutually agreed that we would no longer consult together.

Eventually, we found another shrink with whom we worked on individual kid's problems. Her viewpoint and abilities were more generalized and topics of discussion did not dry up as they had with the first consultant. She left Washington after working with us for several months and not long after that we located the psychiatrist who is presently working with Runaway House.

You may run into professionals who would like to volunteer but are unable to do so on a regular basis. See if you can keep these people on tap in your files for help in specific situations. For example, shrinks may volunteer to do free psychiatric evaluations of kids in order to help get them psychiatric placements. Clergymen may be willing to help with difficult family counseling sessions. Lawyers may advise you during police hassles or may volunteer to represent kids you are working with in court. You may find doctors who feel O.K. about being called in the middle of the night when a kid takes an overdose of drugs and during other health crises.

Professional consultants are invaluable to para-professional project workers. They can provide advice, support, and training. However, make sure that they are serving their proper function—that they are consultants. If a project becomes over-dependent on its consultants, or if it seems that the consultants are actually in control of the project, it is time to reevaluate and reconstruct their roles—or that of the project.

## Staffing

Soon after Runaway House opened we placed an ad in "Vocations For Social Change" (Canyon, California, 94516), a counter-cultural, job-finding magazine, looking for "hip but not hippy" counselors. Since then we have advertised for staff in the Vista and Peace Corps newsletters and through university placement offices. (As time went by we dropped "hip but not hippy" from the ad.) Perhaps half of our staff members have answered these ads. The others were known to people already on the staff, went through our regular trial procedure and were hired. (See staff hiring and training in the collective chapter.)

For the first 10 months our workers were not paid. They held part-time jobs to cover their expenses. We were finally able to pay $25.00 a week plus room by the summer of 1969, which went up to $50.00 plus room and board by the spring of 1970—where it is today.

Like many other counter-cultural youth projects, we have a high turnover rate among staff members. Staff members at RH have usually stayed 4 to 8 months. We presently ask for a 6-month commitment. However, some people find that they cannot handle the pressure of the job or have to leave early for some other reason. We seem to be chronically understaffed.

The average number of kids staying at the house each night has risen gradually and as this number has grown we have had to hire more staff. In March 1970, we were averaging seven to 10 kids per night with three staff people. By March of 1971, the average was 10 to 15 kids at the house each night and we hired a fourth worker to help take the load off the other workers and to start doing followup on kids who had gone home. This followup never got off the ground. One of the RH workers moved to Second House in April, another quit at the end of May, and only two people covered the house during the summer.

Summer time is notoriously slow at Runaway House—kids run away to the seashore or hitch around the country, they don't split to the inner city. In the summer we average four or five kids a night. However, the fall of 1971 hit us with only two staff people handling up to 20 kids a night. We finally hired a third worker in October.

By January 1972, we had decided that we needed to further expand the house staff—hopefully to include five full-time workers. We also hired two young women, students at SAJA's NEP free high school, to work part-time at RH. These part time workers are members of the collective and work with runaways both individually and in groups. For a long time we were leery

of hiring people so close in age to the runaways. We've had to pitch our prejudices—these two young women are really effective.

We are constantly short of staff. This is due to the highly pressured working situation and low pay (people just can't stay for a long time) and because we are very selective in hiring people. As a group, we have decided that we would rather be short-handed than hire people we cannot live and work with well in this 24-hour situation.

We are caught between the needs of the program we are trying to maintain at the Runaway House and the needs of the individuals on the staff. We want to have a small staff that lives in the house to provide continuity and support for the runaways. We do not want to have the house covered in shifts, nor do we want to use a lot of short-term volunteers. However, the staff members living in Runaway House need relationships beyond those in SAJA; they need privacy and time away from the house. People leaving the Runaway House staff at the end of their stints are often burnt out. They have over-extended themselves for months, and withdraw from this kind of work in order to get themselves together again.

People working at RH have to be able to handle all kinds of crises at any time—yet there is little support built into the chaos at Runaway House. The only emotional support is that among the workers themselves. If there are intrastaff problems, and a lot of energy has to go into staff relationships, morale in the house drops and the whole counseling process falters. This is why we are so selective in hiring—and also why we use personal consultants to help resolve personal conflicts.

## Collective

The Runaway House workers plus one of the SAJA administrators make up a subcollective of the larger SAJA collective (see collective chapter). These people make all the decisions governing the operation of the house in weekly meetings of the collective. They determine house policy, make any major decisions about individual kids (how far do we want to stick our necks out for a runaway?), and hire new Runaway House staff members. The collective meetings are also used to hassle through problems that people have in working/living together.

Money to run the house and pay the staff comes out of the general SAJA pool of money. It costs us about $17,000 a year to run the program with three counselors and one house. An enlarged staff, running the two houses we are proposing (we hope to open another RH) may cost around $35,000 for a year's operation.

Although Runaway House has no actual income (the group homes are financially self-sufficient because of child support stipends paid by welfare departments placing the kids), it actually makes the rest of the SAJA projects possible. RH is well known and has a good reputation which makes it fairly easy to get foundation grants to cover expenses. The RH reputation makes it possible to fund and organize new projects.

## How We Deal With Parents and Police Confrontation

At the knock on the door, a runaway peers through the venetian blinds overlooking the front porch and shouts, "Counselors! There are cops and somebody's parents at the front door!"

In a scramble for the windows each runaway dashes to see if these are his parents. This can be disastrous. If the parents see their child staring at them from behind the RH blinds they have proof that he is in the house. The house workers quickly take action to keep chaos from breaking out and to get the kids away from the windows.

Runaway House does not require people to get permission to stay at the house, so periodically parents arrive at the front door looking for their errant child, often with police in tow. Oddly enough, we have the law on our side during these initial confrontations, for the police cannot get into the house without a search warrant. We try to defuse these situations so that the parents will not attempt to get a warrant and come back. It is extremely difficult for parents to obtain a warrant to search the Runaway House because of the support we have in the D.C. court and because most of the kids are from a suburban jurisdiction.

When the parents and police arrive, we do not even open the front door. Ideally, two counselors go out the dining room window to the porch of the row house next door and walk around to the parents and the police standing on our front porch. One staff member speaks with the parents while another worker moves off to one side with the police (sort of divide and conquer . . .). Each worker makes it very clear that we do not give out

any information about kids in the house. We try to remain as noncommittal as possible, showing no knowledge of the individual runaway. We don't want to lie to the parents (or the police), for we may want to be able to work with them at some later date. Therefore, we give no information at all.

We explain the way that Runaway House works: to operate effectively, we cannot reveal who is inside without the kids' permission. We will not betray the trust that these people place in us while staying at Runaway House. We do offer to take a message from the parents to place on our message board "in case the runaway shows up." Under the same "in case" heading, we sometimes request more information, asking questions about the young person and the family. We may try to find out what the parents are willing to do if their son or daughter is willing to try to work things out with them (all hypothetical discussion), and we may suggest alternatives other than strong-arming the runaway back home. We may discuss the possibilities of family counseling at this time—in the abstract. Often we discuss these possibilities even if we have never seen the kid; he may show up at the house later, or the parents may be able to use the information we give them if the kid does show up at home.

The main thing we are trying to do in this situation is to calm the parents down and to remove the element of confrontation from the situation. We do this primarily by remaining calm and firm ourselves and by refusing to be frightened by threats of arrest and demands to turn the runaway over to the parents or police. If the parents refuse to talk rationally, we quickly terminate the discussion, saying that we are not willing to deal with threats and unfounded accusations. We may offer to speak with them at another time—after they have calmed down.

We are not anti-parents. We try to be as supportive of the parents as we can be without revealing any information about the runaway and without betraying his trust in any way. We are youth advocates and therefore must be able to work with parents in a positive way. These people at the front door are frightened and distraught. They have read nightmarish stories about hippies and communes and the drug scene and often picture their 14-year-old lying in a gutter somewhere. If possible, we try to reassure them about the program at Runaway House, so they will not be threatened by us. We may suggest places where they can leave messages for their child. We may assure them that the majority of runaways eventually return home. We deal with each set of parents in terms of what feels right in the situation.

While one worker is talking to the parents, the other staff member engages the police in a different conversation. The police are under pressure to apprehend the runaway when they are with the parents. Often the police feel compelled to act tough and threatening under the circumstances. We have a better chance to appeal to the police when they have been separated from the parents. Often these are beat cops who have been pulled off the street by the parents and they haven't the foggiest idea about what is really going on and what Runaway House is. We explain that over 100 kids per month come to the Runaway House for shelter and counseling. We point out that this may divert them from the police/juvenile court route, saving the police time and trouble.

We try not to be hostile toward the police, remaining calm, but firm in pointing out that they cannot legally enter the house without a warrant. Things have gotten to the point these days that the police may respond, "Hey lady, you know we can't get a warrant on this place." Hostile cops can, however, hassle us by busting kids as they are entering or leaving the house. We have been able to deal with this pretty well by having contacts among their superiors, who tell them to lay off.

It may be very hard in other places to repeat our experience in outflanking the cops. However, it is important to know what your rights are, maintain your cool, and not let police intimidation routines get you to give out unncessary information or concessions.

## Agency Contacts

The Runaway House plugs into the system of traditional social services in many ways that are beneficial to both our project and to the community itself. We often refer individuals back into the system, by helping young people who are afraid or uninformed to find the appropriate agency to help them with their problems—courts, welfare departments, public and private psychiatric facilities, etc. The staff members also have contacts in these agencies so that they can cut down on the amount of delay and red tape that the young person has to deal with. Acting as youth advocates, both in and out of juvenile court, we may arrange foster or psychiatric placements for runaways who come to the house. This relieves the burden on the

often overworked caseworker who may not have the time to search for an appropriate placement for an individual who must be removed from his home.

We have established agency contacts in two ways. We have attended general meetings of agency staffs (especially welfare departments), introducing the Runaway House to the agency workers and explaining the program and how we can see ourselves working with the particular agency. We have, more often, developed contacts within traditional services, by working with individual staff members in an agency on the specific problems of individual runaways.

General meetings with agency staffs can do little to establish the effectiveness of a project and the reliability of its workers. Respect for the project will come about only as individual agency workers deal with project staff members individually. However, such meetings do provide exposure to the youth project and you may find that you can obtain help on specific problems more easily if the agency workers already have some understanding of your project. Setting up and attending such meetings takes up a lot of time and, naturally, diverts energy from the actual work in the project itself. So it may be counter-productive to put a lot of time into agency relations when you are still struggling to get a youth service project off the ground.

It takes initiative, persistence, and self-confidence to track down individual workers within an agency for help on specific problems with kids. Know what you need—whether information or specific help—and keep at it. If you sound like someone who must be dealt with, confident in your purpose, you can track down a worker, via the telephone, who will be willing to give you the help you need. If the first person you contact can't help you, perhaps he or she can recommend someone who can. If you hit a dead end, think of someone you know who may have contacts himself, that he would be willing to tie you into.

You will need a background in what agencies exist in your area and what their purpose and function is. The local mental health association may have printed material that describes the nature of some of the agencies in town. Lawyers can give you a background on the setup in juvenile court. Even the phone book can be a starting point. Look up social service agencies (both private and city government), call the general number and ask them what they do. Keep such information on file so that everyone in the project has access to it.

Getting real help for a runaway involves finding a person within an agency (court, public and private social welfare, counseling, etc.) who will know how to cut through the red tape of his agency to help the young person. This worker usually leads to several good contacts that he knows in other agencies. This slow accumulation of contacts, developed while trying to help individual kids, is the most effective way to build up resource information. Dealing with bureaucracies is a hassle until you find somebody who says, "I'll take care of it." Soon the runaway is in a residential treatment center, or going to juvenile court for a custody hearing, or problems with probation are resolved.

The people with the most individual power in the juvenile court systems are the judges. Knowing a judge, who respects your project and your workers, is very helpful when trying to set up an alternative for a young person through the courts. However, since much advice and information on individual cases is received from court intake workers and probation officers, people starting youth advocacy work must make contacts within the intake and probation sections of the court. The people in these sections are usually much more accessible than judges. Many court workers are young and very concerned about the lack of alternatives available to kids who become involved with the courts. They are often willing to support youth advocates who have alternatives to offer these young people. Contact court workers and see if they will meet with you to exchange information. You can learn how to deal with the courts and what kind of help you can expect from the court workers. They can become familiar with the goals of your project and can become acquainted with your people so that they will be willing to help out when you turn to them.

Although Runaway House operates outside the system and has a freaky looking staff, this has not blocked our building contacts with traditional social services. A masters' thesis surveying traditional agencies' (police, mental health, welfare agencies, and courts in D.C. and its suburbs) responses to the Runaway House showed that those people who had actually worked in cooperation with the RH staff were favorably disposed to the project. However, the survey also revealed that those people who had heard of RH, but who had never actually had contact with the staff, believed a wide variety of rumors about the project. Some had heard that Runaway House was a very good place, others were under the assumption that it was a freak commune; that there was a lot of drug traffic in the house, etc. The

thesis shows us that we still have a lot of public relations work to do to work most effectively with such agencies. However, acquainting agencies with our project in a way that maintains our integrity and effectiveness takes a lot of time away from the actual work we are trying to do with runaways. We are primarily sticking to making contacts individually and letting our good reputation build itself. Much of Runaway House's legitimacy and credibility comes from longevity and experience. We have been working with runaways in this city for nearly 4 years.

Because we work with several jurisdictions we must maintain contacts with a wide variety of agencies. This is especially difficult because of staff turnover. Staff members have to be very careful to transfer information about personal contacts they have with agency workers to newly hired Runaway House staff. This is another reason that we keep all agency contacts on file.

## Other Contacts

Tom Murphy and Bill Treanor were already involved in the Dupont Circle community when they started putting together the Runaway House. They knew people in local politics, as well as the local church leaders and people who were beginning to organize projects in the "freak" community. Murphy and Treanor's involvement in the community made starting RH much easier because they knew so many people in various segments of the community who could help in keeping the house open. Personal friendships with local politicians and people in the D.C. court system had a lot to do with keeping the police from shutting the house down during the first year of operation.

A counter-cultural youth service project must maintain a strange balance in the community. It is pretty hard to be on good terms with the police without the local freaks distrusting what you are doing. The freak "constituency" is important to us because so many kids are referred to Runaway House by people on the street, by the Free Clinic, and by area Hotlines and Switchboard. Periodically we have problems with Hotlines, etc. giving out misinformation about Runaway House (ex: that we call parents and/or police about kids) because of rumors they have heard and also because they do not understand how we can operate the way we do without some kind of collusion with the police. Yet we need to be able to deal with the straight people of the community—politicians, churchmen, agency people—to be able to run the house the way we want to. All that we can do is be honest with everyone, letting police, parents, politicians, freaks, and kids know exactly where we stand and how we do things. Then we hold our ground; we refuse to be manipulated by anyone.

It is helpful to build contacts among:

- Local politicians: Get someone to introduce you to these people and explain your program to them. If they like you they can help cut down on all kinds of bureaucratic hassles. If someone tries to shut you down with picky inspection requirements or obscure laws you can turn to friends with political pull.
- Local lawyers: These people can help with the cases of individual kids and are invaluable during police hassles. If you know your rights and are not intimidated by police confrontations, you may find that you and your lawyers can eventually work out an accommodation with the police that will not compromise the work you are trying to do.
- Clergymen: Churches often give financial support to youth projects. They also can throw the support of their congregations behind you during problems with police or the local bureacracy, lending legitimacy to your program.
- Local bureaucrats: If you make a friend in Licensing and Inspection or on the zoning board, etc. you may avoid a lot of problems. If this person cannot provide actual help, he or she can at least warn you ahead of time if someone is going to try to close you down on a licensing infraction.
- Police: Police departments in large cities operate bureaucratically. It may be impossible to get to know all the beat and patrol cops in your area. However, if you have a friend in the middle of the bureaucracy, if you know the lieutenant or captain who controls the beat cops in your neighborhood, you may be able to influence many of the street cops you have to deal with. Be honest with police, but approach them carefully. Find out if they are sympathetic by asking them for small gestures of support before you decide to depend on what they say to you. For example, the police may be willing to let you know what has happened to a runaway you were working with who got busted.
  Presently RH is regarded with some favor by the Youth Division and Missing Person's Division of the D.C. Police Department because the cops do not like dealing with runaways and distraught parents.

  The neighborhood Patrol Division has been instructed not to hassle RH without first calling a superior officer to the scene. However, we are still having problems with Special Operations Division

policemen, who do not fall under the same superiors. These cops are still busting runaways and staging front porch confrontations. However, they are aware of the fact that they are unable to get a warrant against Runaway House because of our contacts in court. The house is not in danger, but we want to work something out because so many kids are getting busted when they walk out of the Runaway House.

## Future

The Runaway House program is presently overburdened. Even with five full-time and two part-time workers we cannot handle the load. It is impossible to run an effective crisis-intervention program when there may be as many as 25 people living in a five-bedroom house.

Our only answer is to open another Runaway House. We are looking for a building in the neighborhood and for money to fund this new project. Although plans are not finalized, the other Runaway House will probably take longer-term runaways off the hands of the RH workers. The two houses will work closely together, sharing the burden of the work that needs to be done and equalizing the numbers in both houses.

## PROVISIONS OF THE RUNAWAY HOUSE

This house is a temporary place for you to stay while deciding what you will do in the future. You are welcome to stay as long as you are actively trying to solve your problems. The usual length of stay is approximately 1 week. The counselors are here to help you in any way that you will let them.

1. Counselors will not contact parents or any authorities without the knowledge of the runaway.
2. If you enter the Runaway House with illegal drugs or use them on Runaway House property, you will be asked to leave immediately and will not be allowed to return even for a brief visit. Rolling paper, water pipes, pipes, needles and other drug equipment are not allowed in the house.
3. No alcoholic beverages are allowed in the house.
4. Girls are not allowed in the boys' bedrooms, and boys are not permitted on the girls' floor without explicit permission from a counselor.
5. The front door must be closed and locked except when a counselor is present on the first floor. (This is essential to your protection.) You should open the door only if you know who is there. Strangers are admitted by a counselor only.
6. You should refer all questions asked about the house and about runaways to a counselor. This particularly includes giving out information over the telephone.
7. Everyone is responsible for the maintenance of the Runaway House. Beds should be made, ashtrays should be cleaned, soda bottles thrown out, and dishes should be kept clean and in their proper place. If the kitchen is not kept clean, it will be locked.
8. You are requested not to litter the front of the house.
9. Pets are not allowed in the Runaway House.
10. You must be back at the Runaway House by midnight weekdays. On weekends, no one will be admitted to the house after 2 a.m. (The city has a 10 p.m. curfew on unaccompanied persons under 18 years old. Many runaways are picked up by the police for curfew violations, especially in the Dupont Circle areas and on Wisconsin Avenue in Georgetown. Runaways are also often picked up by the police for panhandling, hitchhiking, shoplifting, and loitering.)
11. No guests are allowed in the house after midnight.
12. Each individual is responsible for getting his own food.

These guidelines were written so that you will know in advance what is expected of you while you are staying with us. Everyone who stays at the Runaway House has implicitly accepted these conditions. Unlike your home or school, the name of the game here is not to see how much you can get away with. We trust you and want you to regulate yourselves.



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**CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

**FOR RUNAWAY HOUSE USE ONLY**

Full Name_____Date_____

Nickname_____Date of Birth_____

Father's Name and Address_____

_____Phone_____

(Street) (City and State)

Mother's Name and Address_____

_____Phone_____

(Street) (City and State)

Date Left Home_____Age_____

School Attending or Last Attended_____Grade_____

Religious Affiliation of Parents (if relevant)_____

Person to contact in case of emergency_____

_____

(Street) (City and State)

CAN WE READ WHAT YOU WROTE?

## NICE THINGS TO DO—RUNAWAY HOUSE

1. It is useful to get endorsements from leading people in the community to use in case of hassle. NOT necessary to be done before opening.
2. Get residential rather than business phones—it's cheaper.
3. Install a pay phone for kids to receive calls and to make outgoing social calls. To govern the flow of information about the house, we don't let the kids answer our house phones—parents and police often call those numbers in an attempt to get information about kids in the house.
4. If staff is on a subsistence budget, find a doctor or a clinic willing to give free or reduced rates on medical care. Ditto dentists, etc. Consider medical insurance for your staff, see if someone outside your organization is willing to pay for it.
5. Check out library programs to get large numbers of books on loan.
6. Find plumbers, electricians, mechanics, etc. who are willing to give free labor and/or to show you how to do things. (Our doctor has an electrician license.)
7. Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter are good times to get organizations and church groups to donate dollars, food, appliances, dishes, etc.
8. If ANYBODY says, "If there is ever anything I can do, let me know . . ." file his name and address and take him up on it.
9. Make a friend in the media who will feature your project periodically and who will publish stories about police hassles, etc.
10. Make a friend of someone who owns a truck or a van so you can pick up donated furniture, appliances, etc.
11. Learn the art of getting things for free or at reduced rates.
12. Make friends in the neighborhood so you'll have support if there are hassles with other neighbors. (When the lady across the street called the police about too much noise at one of our group foster homes, the man next door went over and told her to quit picking on us.)
13. Have a message board for runaways where parents can leave messages for kids who might come to the house.
14. Know where to refer people not eligible to stay at your place—switchboard, crashpads, other counseling centers.
15. Keep an up-to-date, clearly catalogued, phone file. File the names of *anyone* who could possibly help you out in the future—with a description of how they could be helpful.
16. Decide what kind of records you want to keep and how to handle them in the least cumbersome fashion. Make sure that your record keeping is not intimidating to the kids you are working with. It *is* important to get parents' or guardians' names and phone numbers—only for extreme emergency. It is nearly impossible to get a kid into a hospital—even treated in an emergency room without parents' consent.
17. Students doing master's theses really love compiling your information for you and researching the effects of your program. However make sure that *they* do the work, not your staff. Do

not waste time spending hours being interviewed by students who just want to describe the status quo.

18. Annual reports are often required by foundations and other organizations donating money. Make sure adequate records of your project are kept.
19. If you are in a university town you may be able to get the school to offer a tuition-free, credit seminar in psychology or theory of groups for your staff.
20. 4:00 a.m. Sunday—Make sure your staff gets plenty of sleep—
21. Know your city well. Be able to tell the kids where not to hang out, how to avoid busts, what local police look out for. Advise them about curfews and any local laws about school hours. Have info about safe parks, free concerts, things to do with their time.
22. Know possibilities for employment, part-time jobs, necessity for working papers, etc.
23. MAKE SURE you have a clear, good working relationship with those people that give out information about your project—switchboard, Hot Line, underground papers, etc. If they tell kids your place is a bummer—you are in trouble.
24. See if the local mental health clinic will define your kids as local residents. They may be willing to see your kids on a drop-in, no background info required, basis.
25. There may be times that you will need a psychiatric evaluation of a kid to help with a court case or something; see if you can set up a way to get these free—local mental health clinic or private shrink.
26. Know what to do if a kid freaks out—know how to call an ambulance—know emergency psychiatric and medical facilities. Find out how you can get kids (suicide attempts, bad trips, etc.) into psychiatric care quickly. (Often your consulting psychiatrist can help there—set it up so that you can reach him in the middle of the night if necessary.)

    If an emergency comes down the wire and you can't get a kid admitted under regular procedures, promise anything—you can work that out later. BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE SITUATIONS THAT YOU ARE NOT ABLE TO COPE WITH AND DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT QUICKLY.
27. Make sure that your house is secure against break-ins. Parents, cops, and burglars climbing in second story windows only add to the daily confusion.
28. Establish a daily routine that counselors and kids can count on. Consider closing the house for a few hours in the afternoon—give the kids and counselors a respite.
29. When establishing rules for the house—make sure that they are clear, concise, and that you are willing to enforce them. Make sure these are rules that the kids can understand and handle responsibly.
30. Develop a means of staff selection and stick to it. It may be helpful to have the person being considered for a job work in the house for several days on a trial basis so that staff members can live/work with him before making a selection. It is, we feel, vital that the staff as a whole decide with whom they will live and work.
31. Separate refrigerators and food cupboards for the staff and kids help cut down on food rip-off. The kids seem to respect the belongings of staff members.

32. If you have nonprofit status, see about getting a tax number so that you will be exempt from local sales tax.
33. Separate floors in the house; one for boys' sleeping and bathroom and one for girls, with counselors of the same sex living on each—that cuts down on problems of supervision.
34. Figure out an effective way to keep and transfer information and messages for staff. A calendar book *anchored* by the telephone is a big help in keeping track of phone calls, attempted and completed appointments, who's off duty, etc. Also a message board by the phone is helpful.
35. Maintaining the office of the organization in a building other than the project house or in the basement, with a separate entrance, will cut down on the traffic in the house.
36. Consider writing up a printout that describes simply the rights of juveniles in your and surrounding jurisdictions and what they can do when and if they are apprehended and where they can turn for help.
37. Sometimes there are parents who will refuse to recognize the legitimacy of counselors because they are young, non-professional, or of a different race or religious faith. Therefore, it is helpful to know professionals, nuns, priests, rabbis, ministers, etc. who can reach people who refuse to deal directly with your staff.
38. While an extensive program to entertain and occupy kids is difficult (and probably counterproductive) some activities are fun. Consider a once-a-week introductory class in yoga or an occasional night of candle-making—participating with the kids in these things is another way to get to know them.
39. Check out grocery stores and see if they'll donate food that they usually throw out (not spoiled food, food like day-old bread).
40. Have an idea (filed) of good schools, private, public, and boarding schools in the area. Know how to help a kid who is living on his own get into school, rehabilitation programs, etc. You may have to be willing to sign for him to get in.
41. Know about reform schools, mental hospitals, detention facilities, etc. This will give you a background of information when you meet a kid who has run away from one of these institutions and knowledge to help when trying to keep kids from being sent there.
42. Suggest that kids, with their parents' permission to be on their own, get a notarized paper stating this to carry with them—also a birth certificate for identification.
43. Check out the local Travelers' Aid Society. See what services they offer that can be used by your program. (ex: Travelers' Aid may be able to help kids from distant towns get the money together to return home.)
44. Consider holding a monthly open house for all those people who call up and want to see your project. The open house can cover many of these people and you won't have to spend several afternoons a week chatting with ladies from church groups, etc.
45. Solicit small monthly contributions. Ten dollar contributions from individuals, clubs, and churches do add up.
46. When working with runaways who arrived at the house in a group, make sure to work with them individually. They always have separate problems. Often, kids with real problems talk a

friend into splitting from home just for the hell of it—it is important to separate these kids when trying to deal with the individual's problems.

47. Watch out for travel groups forming within the house—destination usually California. Often kids who are just roaming the country wile others with real problems into trucking around with them. These large expeditions often result in the whole group getting busted by the side of some interstate.

## Chapter III. GROUP FOSTER HOMES

Annie came to the Runaway House in the spring of the year. A 15-year-old with raggedy red hair, she arrived with a suitcase and a fantastic story about having been a runaway for several months, just stopping in D.C. on the way north from Florida. A couple of days later, we discovered that she was from an extremely abusive home in suburban Virginia. After some pressure from the RH counselors, Annie agreed to call her parents to assure them that she was alive and well. Much to her surprise, she discovered that her parents had disappeared! They had split from Virginia the day after Annie did, taking their other five kids with them, and could not be found.

We learned from Annie that her parents often moved abruptly, without telling the kids in advance and that she had attended twelve different public and parochial schools. Later we learned that Annie's father was a petty criminal—something the kids in the family did not know. The police were after him for forgery. To keep their location a secret, the parents often kept their kids out of school for months after moving to a new town.

We had a devil of a time finding a jurisdiction which would claim Annie. D.C. would not recognize her as its problem and the suburban city she ran from was not willing to take her into custody because her parents were no longer residents of the town! We finally badgered the Virginia jurisdiction into taking Annie into the custody of its child welfare department, but the entire process took nearly 6 weeks.

About five percent of the kids coming through the Runaway House (four or five a month) are kids like Annie, society's throwaways. These are kids with no alternatives—nowhere to go, no one who wants them. They come from hostile or indifferent environments and are at a loss as to where to turn. Because of the shortage of foster homes for teenagers, there is great likelihood that they will be institutionalized if arrested for being on the streets.

During the first year and a half that Runaway House was open, we ran into many of these throwaways. Several of them spent extended periods of time at the house; some lived there for 6 months to a year. The transient nature of RH wasn't particularly good for these people, but there were no alternatives.

With this population in mind, we decided to establish an alternative ourselves: a group foster home. The idea was that the house would be a full-time residence—a home—for these "throwaway" kids. Annie was eventually placed in this home by a juvenile court judge. We thought that most of the kids would live there for a fairly short time (2 or 3 months), until a suitable situation, perhaps a foster family, was found. We found that those "suitable situations" were scarce, and the length of stay was extended to 6 months and finally extended to the 18th birthday, or to the time when the young person could take care of himself.

We were planning to house a population similar to that which came through Runaway House—black and white, male and female, young people between the ages of 13 and 18. We felt that this mixture would provide the greatest opportunity for service and would lead to a positive living/learning experience for the kids. We did not want a "Boys' Home" or a "Girls' Home," but a real family experience. In accepting both sexes into one group foster home, we've given the young people the opportunity to develop friendships other than the narrow dating relationships that often prevail during adolescence. We've had few problems with the kids exploiting this living arrangement. On the contrary, they seem to need and enjoy the brother/sister relationships that have grown among them.

In planning the "Second House" (RH is obviously the first), we decided to have two staff members, one male and one female, as full-time residential counselors. Running a paraprofessional project the way we do means cutting expenses to the bare minimum, i.e., hiring live-in counselors rather than paying three, 8-hour shifts.

Even more important than the financial necessity for live-in staff is the necessity for a "homelike" situation. Male and female staff members living in the house contribute to a natural, rather than an institutional environment. The two counselors are male and female models for the kids. This home environment provides much security and stability that these young people's lives have lacked. People are living in the house together—it is their home.

Our feeling is that most of the kids who are removed from the community, "sent up", are removed at a detriment to themselves, to the community, and to the people who actually do need to be institutionalized. These kids can live in the community, they can live with people. They need love, families, and the experience of living with others. More programs housing "throwaway" kids would alleviate the incredible overcrowding in detention facilities and in public residential treatment facilities, and would allow these institutions to better serve the people who really do need to be removed from

the community. Kids can be cared for in group foster homes at a much lower cost than in institutions. The money saved can be used by the community for other purposes.

## Establishing a House

When organizing a paraprofessional, low-budget group foster home, three things must be done simultaneously: you must assemble a staff, find the actual building to house the project, and track down financing to cover the initial months of operation. You can't open for business until they fall together, yet there is no chronological order.

Many people organizing youth service projects try to get funding before staff, or house, or kids. We feel strongly that lack of financing does not have to halt the project. You can start the house with almost no money and ask financial sources to donate money to keep it going. You'll probably need about $5,000 to cover the first 3 or 4 months. We creamed seed money for Second House from foundation grants to Runaway House. Anyway, you can pull together staff and real estate while looking around for seed money.

When searching for project housing, it helps if you make a friend who is a real estate agent to tip you off to listings, and housing and zoning codes. He can help you to understand the ins and outs of renting and buying property.

## The Origins of Second House

In November of 1969, we hired Judy Tobin, 24. Judy had a year's experience as a child welfare worker in Cincinnati, and a year's work as a D.C. Youth Division policewoman. She was tired of established social welfare work and agreed to be the woman counselor at Second House. Judy spent November familiarizing herself with the counseling situation and the kids at Runaway House. We tentatively hired a seminary student to be the second counselor. November was spent tracking down a house and financial backing.

We searched for a house for a long time and could find nothing in the Dupont Circle neighborhood, where RH is located. Judy happened to be going with an [redacted] (Sigma Alpha Epsilon) fraternity member who knew that the SAE house in the neighborhood (1856 19th St.) was failing and that the fraternity was looking for someone to take the house off its hands. We were able to rent the four story, 10-bedroom house for only $225 a month, which covered the owner's taxes and insurance. This is a perfect example of how personal contacts, luck, and just talking to everyone you know pays off.

The staff, money, and building for the project all fell together about the first of the year. Judy and the seminary student moved into the house around the first of December. One thing that slowed progress was the extensive remodeling and repair work required on the 19th Street house. This took a lot of staff time and energy, and slowed the process of filling the house with kids. The building had been a party house for the fraternity and was in a shambles. It took time and even more effort to make the house liveable to meet the D.C. requirements for rooming and boarding house licenses . . . which we had to have to house and feed the kids legally. When we opened our second group foster home, Third House (we've never been very creative in naming projects) in 1971, we were very careful to obtain a house that did not require extensive repair.

Jay Berlin, 22, a Georgetown University Foreign Service School graduate, was hired to replace the seminary student as the second counselor during the first part of January.

At that time we were operating under a minimum number of assumptions: We knew that we wanted to serve the population of "throwaways." We were planning to have a male and a female counselor and about 10 kids. We felt that we would need a psychiatrist. We were not sure how he would fit in and left that decision to the future. Bill Treanor had previously contacted the National Institute of Mental Health. A psychiatrist in their adolescent program, working with runaways, was very interested in working with Runaway House. When Bill discussed the idea of a group foster home, the psychiatrist agreed to work with us.

Having run into so many throwaway kids at Runaway House, we knew there was a great need for this group foster home, and felt that it would be easy to fill the house. We still thought that the length of stay would be from a few weeks to a few months. We had worked well with throwaways at RH and expected a high rate of success.

These assumptions were tested as Second House evolved. In some ways, as you will see, they were very naive, but we were correct in assuming that there was a

need for a group foster home, and that we could make it work.

## Filling the House

Bill Treanor took a 4-month leave of absence and traveled to Mexico in January. So it was up to the counselors to make Second House work. The house had been established to take care of throwaways who showed up at Runaway House, yet we had to find a way to cover expenses. We also wanted Second House to be legitimate, i.e., legal. Therefore, it was decided that kids who came through the Runaway House, who were to be placed at Second House, would have to be placed there legally. The Runaway House counselors, with the consent of the individual involved, would take the kid to court, have him placed in the custody of his local welfare department and then placed in our group foster home. This is not as difficult as it sounds. There are few alternatives for kids of this type. Judges are usually happy that we have everything set up in advance and are willing to take these kids off their hands. In this way we are able to receive child support stipends from welfare departments for kids referred by Runaway House.

In cases where the parents were closely involved, and recognized a need for foster placement for their child, the RH counselors arranged for child support from the parents.

The most certain way to make sure that the house was self-supporting was to take not only kids who came through Runaway House, but also kids on referral from other agencies such as public and private social welfare agencies, psychiatric facilities and juvenile courts . . . and from parents. We decided to do this for monetary reasons more than anything else. We also wanted to have the house filled to capacity as quickly as possible because we wanted to work with the maximum number of people that we could help at one time. We knew that welfare departments in D.C. and the surrounding counties would be able to pay to place their kids on their caseloads with us. These kids are throwaways who would normally be placed in mental hospitals or overcrowded detention facilities.

We typed letters of introduction announcing our presence as a new resource for teenage placement and sent them to all the appropriate agencies (public and private, religious and nonreligious social welfare agencies, counseling services, mental health and psychiatric facilities). We found these in a directory published for our area. We tried to cover the five jurisdictions that most of the Runaway House population comes from, the four counties surrounding the District (Arlington and Fairfax in Virginia, Montgomery and Prince Georges in Maryland), and the District of Columbia itself. We followed up these letters with phone calls asking for personal appointments so that we could describe more fully what we were trying to do and what services we offered. We asked for suggestions and found out what the agencies' needs were.

In the process of these interviews, we actually trained ourselves in making contacts and working with agencies. As our awareness of the needs of the established agencies grew, we were able to incorporate this information in our proposed program. In this way we acquainted the community with our project while acquiring referrals.

In making agency contacts for referrals, the best people to deal with are the actual caseworkers who have kids needing placement. Try to arrange a monthly meeting with caseworkers and supervisors. You'll find these caseworkers on the staffs of juvenile courts, welfare departments, and private agencies. Also make yourselves known to public defenders and other lawyers who handle juvenile court cases. It is important to have the supervisors present at these meetings so that you can answer their questions and meet any objections or doubts in their minds. But the real source of referrals, and access to the system, is the workers.

Most caseworkers, especially those working for public agencies, have unbearable caseloads. Yet they really want to find good placements for all their kids—placements which are not readily available. If you are offering something that makes sense, is within their financial reach, and is good for the kids, the caseworker will try to use your house and may even buck his superiors if necessary.

This is the process that we followed to build up the group at the Second House. It took us too long to fill the house to capacity (nearly nine months) because we had to feel our way along. However, if you make a point of sending out letters and following them up with personal appointments with supervisors, and if you address meetings of caseworkers, and pursue every lead you get, you should be able to fill a house with six to eight kids once you have a staff, etc., in a couple of months. We were able to do this when we opened Third House, a year later.

When we applied for Government funding, we had to have letters of endorsement from the agencies placing kids at Second House. We found that these letters were very helpful in getting other agencies and influential people to back us. It added greatly to our credibility. You can do the same thing—get letters of endorsement for your project from mental health facilities, psychiatrists, judges, and public welfare departments. Each letter you receive can be used to support your request for the next one.

## Dealing With the System

It is important to note that we did not ask anyone for permission to open Second House. We decided, at the very inception of the project, that we would comply with the laws and regulations necessary for the maintenance of the house, but would find ways to get around those laws and regulations that were totally unreasonable or detrimental to the kids.

*It is almost always possible to get around anything.* These are our organizing rules of thumb: 1) never ask permission; and 2) learn to get around obstacles. We establish a project, start working with kids, and leave the burden of responsibility for enforcing regulations on the bureaucrat. We deal with laws and regulations when we run into them—but do not go looking for trouble by seeking permission. In this situation the contradictions in the system can work to your advantage. You can juxtapose the judges and caseworkers placing kids with you (as their only alternative to institutionalization) against the bureaucrat hassling you about the triple kitchen sink required for a boarding house license. The District is somewhat unique in that there is no specific licensing procedure for group foster homes or halfway houses. It is not clear how much our experience can help people in other parts of the country.

In seeking referrals from the District of Columbia Welfare Department, we discovered that they referred kids on a contract basis negotiated between the private agency and the welfare department. Child care stipend, type of case referred, services rendered, and maximum number of cases to be referred, are enumerated in the contract. After 9 months of negotiation, inspection, and attempts to meet the welfare department's varied requirements for the boarding and rooming house licenses (we could not afford a dishwasher or heavy metal fire doors) we were accepted by the welfare department under license pending status.

Perhaps other paraprofessionals starting group foster homes or halfway houses in jurisdictions which have specific licensing procedures for this type of service project can get around requirements for professional degrees, supervision, etc., by becoming "boarding houses for youth" instead.

We went to all the trouble of obtaining the contract with the D.C. Welfare Department for several reasons. We wanted Second House to serve not only the white population of the suburbs but the black population of the community around us as well. We wanted D.C. kids who come through the Runaway House to have the option of Second House—which was available through D.C. court placement via welfare department custody.

We also sought a D.C. contract to gain legitimacy with the surrounding suburban jurisdictions and with private agencies. The suburban jurisdictions have no means of licensing a facility that is not within their territories and, therefore, use the existence of our D.C. contract as a quasi-license. Consequently, we became a placement facility with the D.C. Welfare Department, even though the stipend that the welfare department was willing to pay per child per month was inadequate and even though this stipend was less than what we were charging. It was vital that Second House be recognized by the District as a foster care service.

It is important to arrive at the proper monthly stipend as soon as possible. We originally charged $200 per month per child, but that figure was more arbitrary than realistic. There are two criteria for determining monthly rates. The first, of course, is a determination of actual operating expenses, prorated over the number of kids to be housed. Before you send out letters stating your costs, do some research and find out what similar projects in your area are charging in order to determine what the traffic will bear.

Two-hundred dollars a month was inadequate to cover our expenses and we presently charged $350 a month per person. We don't get that from everyone—the District doesn't pay us that much, although we are attempting to revise the District rate. When we take kids on private contract from their parents, we negotiate a contract with the individual parents, arriving at an amount based on what we need and what they can afford to pay.

Three hundred and fifty dollars per month is an institutional rate, which we qualify for because of the

services and supervision we offer and because we have professional (volunteer) consultants. This is much higher than the monthly rate that families receive when taking a foster child.

Our two group foster homes just about support themselves. At full capacity they each post about a $350 surplus, which evens out over the long run during the weeks that the houses operate under full capacity. This also covers the discrepancy in payments for D.C. kids and people on private placement.

## Building Up the Group

We built up a group slowly. The first Second House resident was placed there by her parents, a 15-year-old girl who came through Runaway House in January, 1970. The girl needed to be out of the home while her parents went through a painful divorce. This private referral gave us credibility in seeking public referrals.

The second person we took was also a girl, aged 14, referred by a psychiatric facility. She had been in residential treatment for over a year and her living at Second House was seen as a way to ease her back into the community.

We then took in a boy on referral from a suburban public welfare agency. The welfare caseworker, whom we had met during our initial meetings, referred the 17-year-old to us. The next boy, age 16, came through the same suburban welfare department.

Two girls, ages 18 and 15, came to us in the summertime via the Runaway House. RH counselors handled the job of tracking down financial resources. One of these girls was taken into suburban court custody and then placed with us. We were able to take the other girl when a private individual agreed to provide $100 per month for her support. Both girls were the throwaway kids that Second House was established for.

During this time, January through August of 1970, we were trying to solicit outside funds as much as possible, but the money from referrals was keeping us alive. We were not actually self-supporting until the contract with the D.C. Welfare Department went through in September. At that time, three black kids from D.C. were placed with us, two boys, both 14, and a 17-year-old girl. This filled the house. Second House operated at a deficit of $8,000 during the first year. This was covered by extra money raised for Runaway House.

In September 1970, Dodie Butler, 21, moved into Second House to replace Judy Tobin who had enrolled in Catholic University's School of Social Work. Dodie had worked for Runaway House for the past 7 months and therefore, as a member of SAJA's extended family, knew the kids and the Second House routine. The transition period evolved naturally, as Judy became involved in her class work and gradually moved out of the house.

## Developing Intake Procedures

Not long after we opened Second House, we decided that we needed some way of screening the kids who would live there. It was at that time that we began to work with our psychiatric consultant. After some discussion with him, we decided that it would be wise for him to interview the candidates for the house. We discovered that most referring agencies have tested and evaluated the kids on their caseloads and that, as a placement agency, we had a right to see the tests. So we asked for a written social history and a psychiatric evaluation of each person referred to Second House. When kids are referred by Runaway House, the RH counselors arrange for evaluations by volunteer psychiatrists or the local mental health clinic.

This step is used to screen out people who are inappropriate for the program—for example, kids with a history of violent criminal behavior, addiction to hard drugs or girls who are pregnant or with dependent children. These are kids we cannot help due to the open nature of the house and our own limited skills as counselors.

Unless this written material shows that the case is totally inappropriate for Second House, we arrange an interview conducted by the consulting psychiatrist with the counselors present. The purpose of this interview is to meet the young person, to find out how he feels about himself, how he handles problems, and to determine his needs. It also serves to acquaint him with what Second House is and what we have to offer him.

We decided at the very outset of the project that we would only take kids who wanted to live in our group foster home. No one can be placed with us against his wishes.

By the time we make a decision on admitting a young person, we have received four sets of information: the social worker's initial contact with the runaway

which usually includes a description of the young person from the worker's subjective point of view, a written psychological evaluation, a written social history, and a personal interview with the psychiatrist present. After the interview the counselors meet with the psychiatrist to discuss what they saw, what they thought the kid was into, and what they felt about living and working with the individual. Then in consultation with the psychiatrist, we set initial expectations for each individual entering the house.

The admittance decision determines the composition and the focus of the foster home. It also influences, to a large extent, the eventual structure of the house. If the counselors accept young people who are into acting-out or whose behavior is self-destructive, their relationship with the kids will involve giving permission, physical controls, and other restricting measures. If the kids entering the foster home have few needs for external controls, the staff's role can be more flexible. The counselors must assess themselves and their own capabilities in dealing with these kids and must decide what relationship they want with the people in the house.

This admissions procedure is critical from the young person's point of view. Kids want to make it in the group foster home. Admitting someone we could not cope with would be tantamount to setting him up for failure. We can't promise that we'll be able to handle every kid we accept into the house, but evaluating our abilities accurately can prevent our causing more damage to the individual. Usually we can win a young person's affection and admiration rapidly.

Each new resident has a 10-day trial period in the house. This gives him a chance to see how he feels about the group living situation, and we can get an idea of how he will fit into the house. If it were to become evident during this trial period that the situation was unworkable, we would make other living arrangements for the new person.

At various times there have been suggestions that the kids in the house have a voice in the selection of new members—none of which have really stuck. We leave the admission decision to the house counselors and psychiatrist who, hopefully, have a more long-range view of the situation.

## Actually Running the House

By October 1970, things were finally together! We had everything we needed, including kids, and then all we had to do was to run a group foster home. But it was not as easy as all that.

Second House was established because of a need we found in the Runaway House. Several throwaway kids had lived at RH for extended periods of time—two girls for nearly a year. We felt that it was inappropriate for kids to live at RH for so long. Although we had had a few behavior problems at RH, we did not anticipate the behavior problems that we eventually ran into as kids were placed in Second House.

Runaway House is a very transient place and the environment is, for the most part unstructured. Kids who live at RH for extended periods of time have to fend for their own food and obey house rules, but few demands and little responsibility are placed on them. There must be a survival mechanism within the chaos of Runaway House to hold intact those kids who have been abused so much of their lives. At Second House, where there is a higher level of demand and responsibility placed upon them—plus a much higher level of security—that mechanism disappears and the kids often act out their emotional problems. This acting out involves running away, sometimes severe drug abuse, outbursts of violence directed at the counselors and at each other, and destructive sexual relationships.

Our original assumption had been that taking a kid from an unhealthy home and transplanting him in a healthy, supportive environment would solve his problems. We soon revised that assumption!

We soon learned that most kids go through a behavioral "cycle" after they move into the safety of a group foster home. During his early days at the house, a person will be very "good" while he feels out the people and environment around him. Then as trust and security build up, there is more testing of limits and acting out against real or imagined threatening situations. Many kids, having been starved for trust and affection for so long, are extremely frightened by the warmth and intimacy of the group foster home. After months of trial and error, testing and acting out, a more open, healthy person emerges, a person who has learned to confront and deal with his personal problems and who no longer sees the world around him as a hostile place to live.

When we started Second House, we tried to simulate a family, the counselors assuming parental roles. It was apparent that the kids tended to regard the counselors as substitute parents, and as authority figures.

In these parental roles we took responsibility for the kids' behavior, made many decisions for them, and

"mothered" them a lot. We assumed these roles in response to the needs we perceived in the young people and as a result, set up a confusing situation, obviously we're not their parents. We were too young and the living situation was too temporary for us to be able to be "good parents" to them. We compounded the confusion by telling the kids we were not their parents, all the while fulfilling parental functions. They responded with the same defenses that had served to insulate them from their real parents.

We are continually reevaluating our roles as workers in the group foster homes. This process has at times been painful as we have had to reject many of the working assumptions that each of us has brought to the project. The counselor must respond to the ages and needs of the kids involved. His role depends on the amount of control and structure that the individuals in the house need and on the personalities and abilities of the workers involved.

Rules and structures can quickly take on a meaning of their own. It is important to be aware of this and to continually review the effectiveness of any rules and structures you come up with. Remember the goal of the rule or structure and check out whether or not it facilitates arrival at that goal. For example, if your goal is that kids take responsibility for helping keep the house clean, do not take that responsibility from them by forcing them to do work. Instead come up with something that will encourage them to take the initiative. Heavy rules can stifle kids' taking initiative to act responsibly.

We were each raised within the American single family unit. Therefore it is a continual struggle to develop new ways of group living in the foster homes. We do not want to be into a parental control trip and are learning to relate to the kids in the group foster homes as people, not as "SAJA kids." Much of the demand for this evolution of our ideas has come from the kids. We have a lot more to learn from them.

As the group takes more power and responsibility for decisionmaking within the houses and within SAJA staff, people are breaking out of their counselor roles. In doing so we are more able to be real, fallible human beings. And we're breathing a sigh of relief!

As a paraprofessional project, a counter-cultural organization, and as an organization operating on the brink of financial disaster, we are opposed to employing housekeepers, cooks, etc. All tasks to be done in the house are assumed by the people living in the house. Everyone is responsible for doing dishes and for cooking dinners on a rotating schedule. Indeed, we feel it is almost a political issue. Everyone has to cook dinner—male and female, kids and staff—or wash floors, or take out the garbage. Our group foster homes are homes, not institutions, and cooks and housekeepers do not fit that image. We feel that it is important for kids to learn to cook, clean, and work together as part of learning to take care of themselves.

Our experience in the group foster home has a long and often unsuccessful history with regard to getting chores done. The best method seems to be sitting down with the kids, deciding what work needs to be done, and splitting it up among all the people in the house. Then decide who will see that the jobs get done, what penalties there should be (if any) for jobs allowed to slide, and how to get occasional big jobs done. Good luck at coming up with a working system for getting the mundane work done. Our experience has been that we have a meeting, set up a system which works for a while, and when enthusiasm for that system winds down and the mess becomes unbearable, we have another meeting and try again.

Initially we required that all of the kids in the house go to school. In time, however, we found that a mandatory school policy was detrimental for many reasons. The absentee rate at the high school was approaching 40 percent. There was an amazing proliferation of drugs. The racial discrimination, instability, insecurity, and fear operating in the school were all the things we were trying to alleviate in the lives of our kids. Several of the young people at Second House had learning difficulties, stemming from inadequate elementary school backgrounds. This made it extremely difficult for them to keep up in class. The remedial programs at the school were totally inadequate. It turned out that society's and the welfare department's demands that the kids go to school were actually very destructive.

School attendance is no longer a requirement at SAJA's group foster homes. We do believe, however, that a young person's time should be structured. Now our kids do not have to go to public school. They can have full time jobs, when appropriate, or can go to vocational or trade schools. Also, SAJA's eventual solution to the lack of individual attention and the impossible learning situation in the public schools was to start its own school, a free school, in the fall of 1971. But that is another story.

## Structuring the Summer

The first summer (1970) at Second House, there were five kids in the house and we did not structure any summer activities. The kids did not have jobs, nor did they go to school, and the summer stretched into a long period of boredom. The kids were around the house most of the time and had very little to do. There was also a much higher potential for them to get into trouble, since their time was not structured. Contact with each other 24 hours a day made everyone irritable in the hot summer weather.

The next summer we decided to offer diversified activities and to require that the kids' time be structured somehow. We borrowed a farm in Maryland, about an hour and a half from D.C. so that the kids could spend time out of the city. We also created jobs for the kids in the houses through Neighborhood Youth Corps program that we set up. In this way the kids were able to make some money, meet new people, and feel that they had accomplished something.

Structuring time so that the kids are out of the house during part of each day is important during the winter as well as during the summer. This offers them diversified contacts, and experiences and takes a great load off the counselors. This can be done several ways. The organization can offer programs, as we did, that give the kids positive ways to fill their time. Volunteers may be able to take individual kids camping or traveling, which offers new experiences and much needed personal attention. Or the kids can get jobs on their own, which gives them a certain feeling of independence.

In October of 1971 we finally hired a support person who would work in both houses and take some of the load off the counselors. He is George Allen, 26, a graduate of the University of Kentucky Law School. The need for more staff in the group homes was apparent for a long time but we were unable to afford another staff person until the fall of 1971. This need became especially clear when we hired a couple to staff Third House. For the first 3 months of their work at Third House they were unable to take time off together because there was no one to cover the house for them.

The swing counselor, who does not live in either house, can gain an overview of the situation in the houses. He is a more detached person than the counselors living in the houses, which makes his decisions valuable. Since his role is different than that of the house counselors, he is another kind of person for the kids to relate to. His role is still evolving as his job is defined according to the needs of the separate houses, taking into consideration his personality and abilities.

People often ask if we have regular counseling sessions scheduled in the houses. We do not. Counseling is a 24-hour-a-day process. The young person's time is spent as nearly as possible like any other teenager's. A Second House kid lives at "home" with his "family"—a circle of people who care about him deeply. He does not live in an institution. His friends come over for dinner. He spends the daytime in school or at a job. He comes home and does his chores or cooks dinner, and spends evenings at home or out with friends.

One thing that differentiates our house from regular family homes is the weekly group meeting attended by all members of the house. During the time we were planning Second House, we discussed the possibility of weekly groups with our consulting psychiatrist who agreed to be present at those meetings. However, he never conducted the groups, and attended as a non-participating observer.

Weekly group meetings have been used in a number of ways. Sometimes they were used as business sessions, sometimes as legislative sessions establishing house rules and schedules; sometimes they were heavy, emotional sessions involving group confrontation of an individual's behavior. Eventually we decided to hold separate business meetings so that regular groups could be counted on as a vehicle for dealing with emotional situations.

Group sessions have always been useful in alleviating tension in the house because they provide a situation in which it is O.K. to let down defenses, cry, or shout at each other. This can be very important, but how well the group is handled depends on the training and skill of the people involved.

We still need time and money to better train our staff in group techniques. When organizing a group home, find a volunteer psychiatrist or psychologist who will train and advise the staff in group work so they will know what to look for and understand how the group and individuals within the group react.

It was partially for this reason—our inexperience and inability to cope with some of the kids in the group—that we decided to get another psychological consultant. This person was to advise us in working with groups and in specific, difficult cases. We also wanted someone who could help us with interpersonal problems among the staff.

We're talking about counselors working under almost impossible demands, 24 hours a day in an atmosphere where crises often arise. Terrific pressure can build up due to the time factor and demands from the kids. This pressure and any interpersonal staff conflicts must be alleviated somehow. We found it extremely helpful, if not vital, to have a safety valve structured into the work week. This took the form of therapy sessions, or talk sessions, for the staff members with a trained person to whom the staff members could relate easily.

Counseling in one of our group foster homes is sort of an asexual marriage. The personal consultant helps the male and female counselors sort out the problems they are having in living, working, and holding down responsibility together. It is easy to fall into games with the people with whom one is living. It is vital to keep this from obstructing the goal of the house: working with kids. It is also important that the two people working together be able to support one another and honestly give each other feedback. Having a personal consultant aids this process.

As time went on and problems presented themselves, we found that we were able to deal with or get around most of the obstacles to the continuing operation of Second House—i.e., financial and legal problems, interpersonal conflicts, and problems with the kids. In the process we built up a backup group of people who could be termed consultants but might be more properly called resource people. These were lawyers, doctors, dentists, judges, plumbers, caseworkers, and friends in general on whom we could draw when we needed them. If it is ever useful, when you are applying for funds, you might designate people as "consultants" who volunteer time as resource persons. (But be sure to check with each one before including him in your total number of consultants.) We have often done this.

Most of the kids who come to us from welfare are on Medicaid and can get free medical care from a Medicaid registered doctor. It is a good idea to find a family doctor, a professional you can trust, and talk him into doing the paper work involved in registering for Medicaid. Don't just go to any Medicaid doctor. If your project is exciting, you should be able to attract people for this purpose. Having a doctor you can rely on and call at any time is extremely important.

When we started the Second House, in the 10-bedroom barn on 19th Street, we were planning to have two counselors and 10 kids. After several chaotic months with two counselors and eight or nine kids, it became obvious that the kids were unable to receive the kind of individual attention they needed because of sheer numbers. In February of 1971, three kids we could not cope with left Second House. We decided then to maintain the house at a capacity of six. This policy was held to in our second group foster home, the Third House.

Paraprofessionals operating youth service projects, for which there are few models, are often unsure of themselves—we were, in organizing Second House, unsure young adults caring for juveniles adjudicated "delinquent." They may grope toward a person, or a set of theories, willing to provide "answers." Acceptance of one consultant's point of view, or a rigid theory for dealing with adolescents can severely limit the scope and effectiveness of the program.

For a while we almost forgot that we were paraprofessionals. This state of mind evolved while we were consulting with a psychiatric social worker, who was heavily into Transactional Analysis (T.A.) (re. Eric Berne, *Games People Play*), from February 1970 to September 1970. She had developed a very demanding, highly structured, parental method of working with schizophrenics. Due to our own insecurities, we accepted her suggestions on how to structure the houses and how to work with groups and how to deal with individuals within the houses.

This was destructive for us, for the kids, and for the projects. In both Runaway House and Second House, we got into "therapizing" the kids. We spent hours rapping with kids about their problems, the historical origins of these problems, etc., rather than actively doing things with them. At Second House we assumed heavy parenting roles with the kids. Yet the counselors, who were in their early 20's, were obviously not parents. This brought about destructive dependency relationships, as well as confusion and hostility among the kids.

Due to this side trip into therapy, we also felt that we could handle kids with whom we could not actually cope. Some of the kids we took into Second House at that time required a more structured environment and more controls on their behavior than the counselors were competent to supply. This drained the energies of the counselors and also caused the kids, who did not act out violently, to be overlooked in the chaos of the house.

Most of our training in counseling, structuring the environment within the houses, and running groups, during that period of time, came from this one consultant. Although we finally recognized the dangers

of the course we were on, it still took months of questioning and relearning to "debrief" ourselves from this tightly structured way of relating to kids.

To avoid becoming trapped in a narrow theory of adolescent behavior, it is important to maintain a kind of check-and-balance among professional consultants and the theories of behavior that they are into. Make sure that you find therapists for kids who need therapy—you can't supply it as an untrained para-professional. Know your limitations. Take only those kids who have a chance of success in your program. These kids need no more failures in their lives.

There are no pat answers when you are living and working with kids. There are lots of questions, and there are ideas that grow and change with experience. Although it may be uncomfortable, it is necessary to operate without "answers" to respond and change as the needs and problems of the project evolve.

## Using Volunteers in the Group Foster Homes

When you come right down to it, we are pretty skeptical of volunteers. It is very difficult to shift responsibility onto a part-time volunteer who has little information about what has been happening among the people in the house on a day-to-day basis. We are very protective of the houses and do not want the effectiveness of the project to become diluted through the presence of several volunteers.

Because of the 24-hour nature of the counseling job at the group foster home, we maintain very close contact with all the kids. Therefore the need for volunteer support in actually running the house is minimal.

We select volunteers almost as carefully as we select staff members. We check out motives, personality, and the kinds and amount of commitment volunteers can make.

We refuse to live in a fish bowl. Psych students who want to volunteer time to scrutinize and question "nomadic minors" are told to look elsewhere for subject matter for their term papers.

Most volunteers in the group foster homes have specific skills to teach or they volunteer for specific tasks. At different times we have had dance/yoga classes, art classes, and old-time movies in the evenings. Other people have volunteered to take the kids on camping trips, to museums, etc. One girl offered to cook dinner and answer phones at Second House to cut down on interruptions during Tuesday night group meetings. We have people on tap to act as tutors and sometimes as "big brothers" to individual kids.

We feel a lot of volunteers would be confusing to the kids. Many volunteers wandering through the house also intrude on the home-like atmosphere of the place. The kids in the houses need a few, firm trusting relationships rather than dozens of interested acquaintances.

We have always had a problem with people who want to "help" not showing up when there is actually work to do. Therefore, we test a volunteer at first by giving him low level responsibilities such as answering phones and the door during group. If he shows up on time, handles the task responsibly, and relates well with the kids, we give him more to do. These decisions rest mainly on the gut-level feelings of the people in the house about the volunteer. Some volunteers have become close friends of the house, and as they have become more skillful, have been given more responsibility.

Volunteers turn up from all kinds of places. We get an influx of volunteers (and staff applications) after each TV special or news articles on SAJA. Seminary students especially, but all students, are a source of volunteers. Some students can get university credit for this type of work.

Our personal friends are our best source of help, particularly in covering the group homes during weekend staff retreats. They spend a lot of time in the group foster homes (our homes) and become involved with the kids and the house routine. The kids like and trust them. The kids are happier when our/their friends help out at the house. It has happened the other way—regular volunteers have become our/their friends.

## Maintaining Contact With Referral Agencies

During the first several months of group foster home operation we were lax in maintaining contact with agency caseworkers referring kids to our houses. We kept irregular contact by phone and occasionally invited caseworkers to dinner, but we did not submit regular reports on the individual kids to the sponsoring agencies. We were finally confronted on this by a caseworker from D.C. and quickly got it together. We developed forms which were fairly easy to fill out and gave a clear bimonthly report on the progress of individuals in the group foster homes.

It is vital to keep in touch regularly with the kids' caseworkers. Several caseworkers complained to us that

they only heard from us during crises or when the kids need health or clothing allotments. We eventually learned to keep the caseworkers informed of the kids' successes as well as their crises and established much better relations with the agencies referring people to us.

## Coping With the Reality of Drugs

Most of the people referred to SAJA's group foster homes have had extensive experience with soft drugs—marijuana, hashish, LSD, and mescaline. Many have used drugs self-destructively. It would be absurd for us to believe that we could get kids to stop using drugs if we came down with a lot of moralistic claptrap. Nor do punishments or restrictions stop self-destructive drug use. We learned this from our "parent" stage.

We do have a flat prohibition against drug possession or use on the premises. Drugs in the house threaten the entire project and endanger the welfare of all people in the house. A person caught with drugs in the house is in danger of being thrown out on his ear. This is made clear during the initial interview with each individual. None of us (and the kids agree on this one) will allow such irresponsibility by one person to close down the entire project.

Drug use outside the house is a different story. We are unable and unwilling to police the movements of the kids or to regulate their contacts when they are out of the house. The more responsible a kid is, the more freedom he is allowed. We have learned to recognize some forms of drug use as self-destructive behavior and therefore we tend to supervise the kids who are into drugs a little more closely.

In concerning ourselves with excessive drug use, we have found that helping each individual learn that he is a valuable, important human being is the most effective way to deal with the problem. A kid who feels O.K. about himself is not going to destroy himself by burning his mind out on drugs.

Again, we are trying to help these kids learn to take care of themselves. Therefore, instilling a sense of self-value is much more productive than a strict set of rules. Rules do not protect an individual once he is living on his own.

## Establishing a Second Group Foster Home

After about a year, the number of referrals that we received at the Second House Indicated a need for another group foster home and therefore we put together Third House. Third House was to serve the same throwaway population, to have six kids and two counselors, and to operate in much the same way as Second House.

Organizing Third House was very different from setting up Second House. We knew what we were doing and had an established reputation as a child care agency. We had also made and corrected a lot of mistakes through our experience with Second House.

We applied for and received a $10,000 grant from a local foundation as seed money for the Third House's first few months of operation. We hired two ex-RH counselors to staff the house, Melinda Bird, 22, and John McCann, 22. Both had been around during the first painful, learning year of Second House and had many new ideas of their own. Our doctor found us a fine house in the neighborhood which had once been a rooming house. Four kids who had been through Runaway House, and had been taken into court custody, were waiting to move into Third House. SAJA's second group foster home opened its doors in January 1971. With a couple of additional referrals from community agencies, Third House was self-supporting in just 2 months.

Again, difficult procedures. The District required a separate contract with Third House, a development we had not expected. John did much of the required renovation himself. However, this cut down on the amount of time he could initially spend with the kids. We've learned that as much of the licensing and repair work as possible should be done before people move in. (Yet the whole project should not be held up for this reason.) At least the second time around, when you have become established and won't be stopped by bureaucrats, try to get this work done ahead of time. If you can't get the work done ahead of time, contract it out to some freaks who will work for little money. Try to arrange things so that counselors can spend the first, formative weeks of the house with the kids.

Before the house opened, the Third House counselors made several decisions about what kind of work they were planning to do and what atmosphere they wanted in the house. Their conclusions evolved from contact with Second House and from discussions with the RH kids who were moving into Third House.

John and Melinda decided to be sure to take their

alloted 2 days off each week. Therefore they had to structure the house so that one person could cover it while the other staff member was off duty. The Second House counselors often went weeks without taking time off and were nearly burnt out before they started taking care of their personal needs.

They decided to try to keep things in the house as well-planned and scheduled as possible. This included taking allotted time off, splitting up responsibilities without regard to male/female roles, keeping track of the kids, etc.

The Third House counselors decided to do a "house thing" with the kids once a week—going swimming, skating, or to a movie. At first this activity was compulsory—which caused huge fights. So instead of putting energy into fighting they worked at creating exciting things for the group to do together.

Again, having learned from the Second House experience, the people starting Third House decided to look for three consultants. They wanted a consultant on group technique, a personal consultant, and a "technical" house consultant.

The Third House counselors wanted a technical consultant, which Second House did not have, who could look at the structures in the house. They were interested in an academically oriented professional to provide a dialogue about models for setting up structures and working with kids. Technical consultants can constantly call the structure and the climate of the house into question.

It is very easy to get caught up in details. "We're out of milk. Joey is late getting home from school. I have to call the plumber tomorrow." You can lose sight of what is actually evolving in the house, how it feels to the people living there, and what visitors pick up while in the house. (That is probably what happens to many parents.) A semidetached observer, who can pick up vibes and can maintain an overview of the situation, is a great help in maintaining the climate that you want in the house. This could be a consultant, another member of the staff, or both.

The house counselors must be aware of their own feelings and not become defensive when told that the atmosphere is tense, or that the kids seem disenchanted with the place. We had this difficulty at Second House. Staff members were very defensive about "their" house, and it took a long time to convince them to relax and let the house evolve more naturally. It is important to stay open to criticism and to step back once in a while to see what needs to be changed.

Third House has helped to stabilize Second House. The counselors in the two houses are able to provide support and insight into problems for each other. Soon after Third House got going, the counselors began meeting once a week, with one of the administrators, to discuss problems specific to the group foster homes. This weekly meeting eventually evolved into the group foster home collective; a natural staff grouping which makes all operating, hiring, and intake decisions for the group foster homes. Since Third House came into being, we have been able to provide more appropriate placements for the kids referred to us. We can offer a choice of two, interdependent group foster homes which differ in the personality of the group, age of the kids, personalities of counselors, etc.

A case in point is Fred, 14, who was placed temporarily with our summer farm program. Fred needed a permanent placement and we had openings in both our group foster homes. Fred had been in reform school for several months and had lived a pretty rough life before that. He was loud, lied a lot, and got into all kinds of scrapes. He spent a few days at Second House and obviously would not make it there. The Second House kids were older, more hip, and more verbal than Fred and would not put up with his noise or his shenanigans. So Fred moved to Third House. The kids in Third House are slightly younger than those at Second House, noisier as a group themselves, and less into "rapping." They saw Fred as a sort of younger brother, a pain in the neck perhaps, but a nice kid. Fred is working out well at Third House. He's acting more responsibly and cutting down on the lying. He fits into the group at Third House and might not have made it with the kids in Second House.

The group foster homes, as a part of SAJA, have quite an extended family. All of our projects are in the same neighborhood and therefore the workers in the SAJA projects live nearby. The kids in Second and Third House have over 25 staff members and ex-staff members living in the urban village around Dupont Circle to whom they can relate in a wide variety of ways. These people also provide a pool of individuals to help out in the house when counselors need time off.

Second and Third House are related families. About 10 of the kids from the group foster homes attend the SAJA–New Education Project free school. There they have another group of people to relate to.

## Learning Limitations

One of the biggest lessons we have learned is that our own limitations mean we cannot help everyone. The past 2 years have tempered the idealism that originally founded Second House. At first we took kids into Second House who were quite emotionally disturbed. However, we found we did not have the skills, or the energy, to provide a sufficiently structured environment that would protect them from their own self-destructive behavior.

Annie, whose story leads this chapter, had to leave Second House after 7 months. She cut school one day and wandered to one of the most dangerous sections of D.C. She was then "raped" in an abandoned office building. She told us afterward that she had also been "raped" the night before by a "friend" whom she had invited to her babysitting job. Annie was obviously looking for it. She could not handle the responsibility of her freedom at Second House.

Our predominantly white, middle-class staff is also questioning its ability to meet the needs of deprived black street youth. The dilemma is how to foster a healthy black consciousness without black role-models. We receive few counseling applications from black people. This may be due to their unwillingness to work for a white organization. Black people also can make more money doing similar work in government or community sponsored projects that work with black kids.

We haven't had much success with black kids who were really street kids. No matter what kind of trust or warmth was built up, a confrontation came down to black and white. This was caused by fear, lack of communication, and perceptions of the world—but it closed off all hopes of communication.

However, hundreds of black kids in the D.C. area need placements so we've reevaluated our abilities. We will now accept young blacks if they are fairly verbal, have some experience relating to whites on an intimate basis, and do not need physical controls on their behavior. In one instance we worked out a "big brother" arrangement with a black school counselor so that one of the black kids in Second House would have someone as a model.

We are not willing to take a person we can't handle, because he is the one who is hurt by this largesse. Housing someone for a couple of months and then asking him to leave, largely due to our own limitations, is not a favor.

## Counselor Transition

We try to make staff turnover as smooth as possible. The new staff member moves into the house at least two weeks before the old counselor leaves. In this way he can receive on-the-job training from his predecessor and he has a chance to build up friendships with the kids which helps him to support them during the difficult time when the old counselor moves out.

The entire staff of both houses changed in the months from April to July of 1971. In early April, Chuck White, 29, an ex-seminary student, was hired to temporarily act as a third counselor at Second House, eventually replacing Jay Berlin. Later that month Sally Rodes Wood, 23, moved into Second House to replace Dodie Butler who left the first of May. Jay left in the middle of June. His departure coincided with the actual moving of Second House, from the barn on 19th Street to a smaller but nicer home at 1748 S Street a block and a half away.

Melinda and John, at Third House, had both made 6 month commitments to the house, commitments that were up around the end of June. During June, we hired David and Alfhild Lindsun to be the counselors at Third House. They are the first couple to work together within a SAJA project. They moved into Third House in late June. Melinda left the house in the first part of July and John moved out about a month later.

Counselor changeovers were rough at both houses. The kids were extremely threatened by the idea that the counselors whom they had grown to love and trust were leaving them. Some of the kids had come into the houses fearing the warmth and imtimacy there because they had been abandoned in the past by people they had trusted. Some of the kids saw this happening again when the counselors moved out of the group foster homes. A couple of them acted out this fear and danger physically—one boy ran away several times.

We tried to explain our leaving in terms of our moving on to another stage in our lives. Each kid at Second and Third House would be doing the same thing eventually, when he left the group foster home. We also made it clear that we wanted to maintain the relationships we had with the kids in the houses, and that they could

build similar relationships with the new counselors. The kids understood, yet were still afraid. As the new counselors moved into their positions, and the old counselors were phased out, the kids were able to see that things were working out well, and the turmoil gradually disappeared.

We doubt if there is any way to get around the few weeks of uncertainty when old counselors leave and new staff moves in. However, we are trying to cut down on the number of times this happens to each individual in the group foster homes by asking for a year's commitment from new staff, rather than the former 6-month commitment. We also plan to hire new staff members far enough in advance so that the kids can build trust with the new people before the previous counselors move on.

## Changes in the Houses

The group homes have continued to grow and evolve over the past few months. Having survived our parental stage, Second House is now working toward a collective, communal spirit. The approach is more egalitarian; the house is much less structured. The kids are taking a more active role in running the house and send a voting delegate to foster home collective meetings. While the kids in the house are demanding more participation in determining policy, there is still a discrepancy between this desire for participation and the actual acceptance of the accompanying responsibilities.

The staff members do not cop out behind counselor roles. Their approach is nondirective and nonconfrontation oriented. The counselors accept each kid in the house as an important person and expect responsible behavior to evolve from this acceptance. We feel it is important not to hinge personal acceptance on responsible actions. Second House is attempting to reach the point where all conflicts and all decisions are resolved by the house group, with counselors having no extra group power. We are still in the groping stage.

When determining the type of atmosphere you want in the group foster home and the approach staff members will employ, there are several things to keep in mind. You must determine what mode *you* feel comfortable with. (The new counselors at Second House were not willing to put on a parent act.) You must figure out the needs of the kids in the house. Several of the kids at Second House have been around for a while and are pretty together. They can handle the responsibilities of collectively running the house. Be careful not to sell short the abilities of the kids to act responsibly. A 16- or 17-year-old who will be moving out to live on his own must learn to think for himself. He does not have the time to get into and then naturally grow out of a parent/child relationship. A 13-year-old may want and need a more structured environment and will have 3 or 4 years to grow to independence.

At Second House chores are still divided up among everyone, but the counselors no longer take responsibility upon themselves to see that kids do their work. This responsibility is shared by everyone in the house. As the counselors have become less directive, weekly group sessions have become the property of all the members of the house with little counselor/kid distinction. Second House has a new consultant sitting in on group who participates much more than did the previous psychiatrist. He comments on the dynamics of the group and facilitates open communication.

Third House is moving in the same general direction as Second House although more slowly—the kids' interest in direct participation is not as strong as that in Second House. The workers in the house are definitely inclined toward collective operation within the house, but feel that some of the initiative for this participation must come from the kids.

The counselors rely on personal relationships and talking in dealing with problems with individual kids. They are not into laying down rules "for the kid's own good." While structures for individual kids are looser than in the past, Third House has decided to set up stronger measures around things that affect everyone—mainly house maintenance. A reward system for daily chores has been worked out. Each member of the house draws a daily chore, to which is assigned the value of his weekly allowance. If a person doesn't do his chores on a particular day—maybe he just does not feel like it—someone else in the house can complete the task and will receive one day's percentage of the allowance of the person responsible for the job. (The kids receive $3.00 per week regular allowance and $15.00 per month for clothing.) So far this has worked well. This is another way of sharing responsibility for getting work done.

The group at Third House is beginning to take responsibility for more house decisions. The collective meetings are nondirective and definitely a forum for everyone equally.

The two houses have developed very different cultures

or atmospheres. This is primarily due to the types of kids who have moved in. Second House kids are hip and verbal; the house has a definite freak culture. Third House has a younger feeling and is noisier. The kids in the house, black and white, are into more of a black street culture than a hippie trip. The animal population at Third House includes two kittens, a half-grown dog, one monkey, one gerbil, and two love birds. So far, Second House is content with a dog and a cat.

SAJA's group foster home program has changed considerably in the past 2 years. What began as a temporary placement for the throwaway kids living at Runaway House, has grown into two group homes, available to the people living in them as long as they need to live there. Second and Third House now serve 12 kids. There are four resident staff people and one swing counselor. Each house has psychiatric consultants providing criticism and support for the staff. The kids are beginning to take more power over their own lives through the medium of the group. One representative from each house belongs to the foster home decisionmaking collective.

This evolution is operating continually. During the week that this chapter was being written, the kids and staff in the group foster homes tentatively changed the intake procedure for new residents so that the kids in the houses could participate in the decision. It was proposed that a representative of the kids be included in the initial interview—formerly made up of the person on referral, the consulting psychiatrist, and the two staff members. After the intake interview the person on referral would stay at the house for dinner, and afterward would meet in a group with the kids in the house. This would be followed by a meeting of the whole house, staff, and kids, to decide on the person's admission into the house.

There have been five "graduates" of our group foster homes; kids who completed their stay in the house and moved on. Two returned to their parents as planned. Three are living on their own and are still closely involved with SAJA people. Two of these kids attend the SAJA New Education Project Free School. They live in the neighborhood and are an important part of the peer group in the houses. Three more people are preparing to move out. They, too, will be living in the neighborhood and will continue going to the free school. All of these kids were candidates for reform school when we met them. Our group foster homes were their only alternatives to institutionalization. Now they can take care of themselves, and with the support of the SAJA extended family, can live productively in the community.

## OTHER NICE THINGS TO DO—GROUP FOSTER HOMES

1. Check into buying food wholesale. If you have adequate storage facilities, time and money can be saved this way.
2. Have an open house for teachers and administrators if your kids go to public school. The teachers are thrilled to find someone interested in the school. It is good to know several of the teachers—especially if one of your kids gets kicked out of school and you're trying to pull strings to get him back in.
3. Have a house dog. He'll be a good watchdog and good for the kids. Our house cat had kittens which was a real treat, but we had a hard time getting rid of them. Remember that hamsters, gerbils, and white mice have a tendency to procreate profusely.
4. Set up a schedule so that everyone (male and female, counselor and kid) gets involved in cooking meals, doing dishes, and cleaning house. This quickly cuts down on role differentiation!
5. Check about free tickets to movies, circuses, concerts, etc.
6. If you get to know people in the city recreation department you may be able to use city pools, etc. for free.
7. Many organizations do service projects for underprivileged kids. Get your name on *that* list. Then only accept projects that will help you out—furniture and clothing drives, money, food, etc. will be more helpful than a party thrown for the kids by a fraternity or sorority.
8. Planning a trip? You might get the use of a car from a car rental agency or dealership if you plan far enough in advance. Or see if someone outside the organization will rent one for you. Again, planning ahead for the trip, you may be able to find somebody who knows somebody (ad infinitum) to house you and perhaps a social service organization so enamored with you that they'll provide money for you to take the kids out to dinner. (We did this in Akron, Ohio, on our way to Michigan with the Second House kids at Christmas.)
9. Furniture stores will donate rug ends and perhaps furniture to you if you contact them and then write a letter on organization stationery—probably tax deductible for them.
10. Know what to do if one of your kids gets busted. Do you need papers identifying you as legal custodian? If so, have these for all your kids. Also, know a good lawyer—and it is nice to have a friend in the juvenile division of the police force.
11. Area mental health clinics may be willing to define your kids as area residents (there may be a hassle if kids come from another jurisdiction) for therapy if that is called for.
12. Social service agencies often have monthly meetings when supervisors and caseworkers get together. Find out when these are and see if you can speak to them about your project. You can often reach 20 to 30 people this way.
13. Figure out a satisfactory phone arrangement. Perhaps have two phones, one for the kids' incoming and outgoing calls and one for "business" calls. Agree on a method for taking messages. A bulletin board or notebook near the phone may be helpful.

14. Sometimes it is helpful to make "contracts" with individual kids—verbal or written agreements outlining what he wants to get out of his experience at the house and what the people in the house are willing to do to help him. A discussion, soon after he arrives, about why he is in the group foster home and establishing goals for his stay in the house helps clarify the house expectations for him, and his expectations for the house. These contracts, or goals, may grow and change during his stay at the house.
15. For a while, we had a "fairy godmother" for Second House—a wealthy woman who did nice things for the kids.
16. Check into commodity foods from the Agriculture Department, State surplus food programs, and try to qualify for food stamps.

## CHAPTER IV. FUNDING—with a P.S. on scrounging

Most people organizing youth service projects think that they need about three times as much money to start a project as they actually do need. If you have to pay rent on a building and at least to feed your staff, you must have a few hundred dollars to cover the first few months of the project, but that is all you need to get going. These first few hundred can usually be found in people's personal savings, or can be scraped together from churches in the area. Pull together enough money to get started, get the project rolling, and then attack the more difficult business of long-term fund raising. It is easier to get foundations, churches, etc. to donate money to an established project than to a blueprint.

The urgent expenses, of course, are rent, utilities, and staff salaries. You can get around the last by housing the staff in the project and, if necessary, staff members can hold down part-time jobs to make money for food. This is how the Runaway House operated during its first 10 months.

When Runaway House first opened, we were really shy about asking for money. We thought we would rather starve than ask for money—and nearly did! Money given to the Mustard Seed coffee house for work with runaways ($2,500) covered rent and utilities on the building which ran around $365 a month. Other house expenses were paid for by the counselors themselves—the phone bill, their food, etc. During most of the first year of operation, donations just covered rent and the counselors worked part time to make personal expense money.

After Runaway House had been open for several months and had become established as a good project, meeting a real need in the community, we approached a local foundation, the Public Welfare Foundation. We showed them our project and received a $5,000 grant. At that time we also received $2,000 from a suburban church. So after 10 months of operation we were able to offer our three staff members a salary of $20 a week.

We feel that we had to start this first project the way we did, because we didn't have a reputation that would attract funding. We needed time to build that reputation, yet were not willing to let the opening of the house wait due to lack of funds.

Everyone is not suited to fund raising, either by personality or inclination. If you are working with kids, but are not into fund raising, find someone who enjoys that kind of wheeling and dealing and get him to work with you. A well-connected salesman can pull off money for any project at first, but as time goes on you are better off with a good project and a lousy fund raiser, than vice-versa.

SAJA has been able to preserve a great deal of independence from outside pressure. We have not shaped Runaway House, group foster homes, or other projects to meet the expectations of people outside SAJA. Groups giving us money have no power over how we operate. If they do not like the way we handle things, their only option is not to give us more money. (This has not been a problem.)

It is important to figure out what your possible sources of income are. A group foster home, as we have said before, can get child support stipends for the kids it receives on referral. Kids who come to you via street programs, or Runaway Houses can be taken to court or the child welfare department and then placed with you on a child support stipend. Other sources of child support may be the parents, churches, private individuals, or combinations of the three.

Fund raising seems to have a certain chronological order to it. First, approach local contacts. Initial funding can be found among local churches and foundations. Then as the program becomes more established check out sources further away. There are various State funding mechanisms that we know little about, State planning commissions for youth, State juvenile delinquency prevention programs, etc. Also check into the possibility of the Justice Department's Law Enforcement Assistance Administration juvenile delinquency prevention funds, although these may have too many strings attached. Eventually, when the project is well enough established to afford the time and energy spent on big time fundraising, check into funds from national foundations and the Federal Government.

Funding from churches usually comes with few strings attached and with far less effort than government or national foundation money. Episcopal churches are probably the best source of funds. Each pastor can strongly influence the decision about the distribution of church donations. Social-action-oriented Friends Meetings, and Unitarian churches, are often helpful for short term, small amounts of funds. In our experience, other church groups take longer to donate financial support because several people are involved in the approval of a grant. Catholic churches are already committed to the

many social welfare institutions and schools run by the Church and therefore donate little money to other projects. Their funding mechanisms are inflexible and parochial.

The District of Columbia has a black administration which is unwilling to use limited city funds to deal with the problems of white, suburban youth who come into the city. Therefore, we have been unable to obtain city funds for Runaway House and our other projects and have little experience with the problems of programs partially funded by local jurisdictions. Projects in Boston, Milwaukee, and San Diego have received local government funds, however.

The local governments in the suburban cities in Maryland and Virginia are unwilling to spend money on our projects in the District, even though most of the kids at Runaway House come from these neighboring jurisdictions.

However, people in other cities should check out possible local government funds, and any strings attached to them. Also, approach community recreation departments. They might think that your work in keeping runaways off the street is worth money. Community mental health organizations might also be able to cream some money off their budget in your direction.

SAJA has just begun contacting the large foundations that fund projects on a nationwide basis. Initial contacts show that effective presentation is vital. We are presently learning how to present the kind of proposals that will describe our projects accurately and will intrigue the members of these foundations' boards.

It takes hard work to write clear, concise proposals for foundation and government grants. We have never written very professional proposals. In the past we have asked representatives of foundations, and government funding agencies, to come to the projects, meet us, and get a feel for what we're doing. This has been a simple matter as far as local foundations are concerned, and the Federal Government is right down the street. However, we will have to work harder to convince the out-of-town, national foundations to fund our work.

We've found that if we are fairly diplomatic and present a workable project, foundation board representatives respond favorably. They are intelligent people who can recognize a good project.

It has been most difficult for us to get funding from the Federal Government. In the main, Federal funding programs are not geared to meet the needs of low-budget, grass-roots, paraprofessional agencies. For instance, if you receive a $3,000 project grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, and you have not been funded before by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, it will take two or three months after you are notified that you will be funded, for you to actually get the money. So you will need to have about $3,000 in your organization's bank account to cover the cost of the project until you receive the Federal funds. Government agencies have very few grant programs that do not have such a time lag. The bank balances of low-budget organizations like SAJA are chronically low. This makes it very difficult for us to apply for grants from programs from which money is not immediately available.

The absurdity of this situation emerges when one realizes that money could be saved by the Government if it funded, for example, private, low-budget group foster homes. These group foster homes are inexpensive in comparison to professional, institutional facilities, for example, low security "boarding schools" which house kids adjudicated beyond parental control. This is the same population housed by our group foster homes, yet these institutions are often granted Government funds, because they can afford to wait for reimbursement. Organizations like SAJA cannot. Yet SAJA serves the same population, and for less money.

Unless the Government creates funding mechanisms that correspond to the reality of low budget, grass-roots organizations, it will not be possible for these paraprofessional groups to afford Government grants. Small grants, donated outright to the general budgets of these organizations, must be developed. These may be used for staff training, project expansion, improvements on project buildings, etc. Small, forward funding grants which are not preceded by months of red tape and do not require polished, professional proposals are needed to provide seed money for new projects. Paraprofessional youth service agencies complement the existing community mental health services. It would seem to be in the interest of the people, and therefore, the Government, to support these private groups which are dealing with youth problems that other, established agencies are unable or unwilling to approach.

It has been our experience that the attitudes of foundations, and especially the Government, fluctuate. Sometimes they feel that runaway youth are a very important problem and at other times they have found other major social evils to combat with their limited

funds. We've learned not to depend on one source of capital for very long, and spread our money as thin as possible to cover the times when runaway and throwaway kids are not popular. We also keep in touch with many funding sources, and keep looking for more funding even when we are adequately covered for awhile.

SAJA has diverse sources of funds for its youth service projects. Others often have one major source of funding, a Government or private grant covering the project for an entire year. Depending on one source can be pretty shaky. Many grants are given to initiate experimental projects—it is much more difficult to raise money from the same source to keep a project going year after year. It is important to stay on top of this and to do fund raising well in advance.

While fund raising we do have a community of people to keep in mind—the counter-cultural, free community that SAJA is a part of, and the kids that we work with. Were we to apply for money from Dow Chemical Company, for example, they would be really turned off and would question SAJA's motives and ethics. This is something to keep in mind.

Of course, our precarious fund raising approach depends heavily on finding staff members who are willing to continue working when money is scarce. Again, this is easier for people living in a project because they do not have to pay rent. Also we work in a very casual setting and do not have many clothing expenses. People worked at RH for the first several months without pay. A year later, during the financially dry summer months, the staff members (then just RH and Second House) voted to halve their salaries. We did this for several reasons. It was difficult to raise money in the summer. Second House had been slow in filling up and was losing money until the fall of 1970. We cut our pay because we did not want to carry a huge debt in staff salaries on the books. Had we not cut our salaries, during those dry months, any money received in the fall would have been wiped out in paying past debts to the staff—and we would still have been broke!

Try as we might, we have found that there are inevitably some dry times when there just isn't any money coming in. Foundation boards go on vacation, but our financial needs don't. During the times when we are nearly broke, we pay rent, and buy food for the counselors and the kids in the group foster homes. Since these are the only absolute expenses, we've been able to make it. This is another good reason to hire young adults, who do not have families to feed. Now tha SAJA has grown to include 25 staff people, several livin in apartments, it is more difficult to cut salaries. Peopl living outside of the housed projects have the expens of food and rent and are unable to spare much out c their $75 per week. (Staff in houses now make $50 p week.)

This tight financial situation severely limits variety i the SAJA staff. Married people supporting familie cannot afford to work with us. We have also had gre difficulty in hiring black people to work for such lo wages. This is understandable. Black people can d similar work and make much more money working fo city and State youth programs. We really need to attra black people to our projects, especially to work in th group foster homes. We will not be able to do this unt we are more financially secure and can offer highe salaries. Eventually we would like to raise salaries so tha trained SAJA staff people can afford to stay with th organization for longer than the original 6-month o 1-year commitment they make when hired. Their skil and personal commitment would be valuable furthering the long range goals of SAJA.

We have not worked with a board of directors or a advisory board. Although we did assemble a group o people influential in the community when Runawa House was started, their purpose was to lend legitimac to the operation, they were not really a functionin board. We have not felt the need of a board to d fund-raising for us. Foundations that are interested funding small, grass-roots organizations prefer to talk t the people actually doing the work, and we prefer t talk to them. However, other projects around th country do have boards of directors and work with the to varying degrees of success.

Perhaps the best of both worlds would be to set up a advisory board of people who are politically influenti in the community and are willing to make contacts fo you and will help you out of tight spots. However, a least from our point of view, it would be important t make clear to these people that your staff is in charge o the project, that these advisors are in it to help whe *you* need *them*, but have no power over the operation o the project. We have a similar, although unofficia backup group of people, people we have met whi organizing projects during the last 3 years, and othe who know of SAJA through Bill Treanor's involvemer in local politics. If you are not into local politics, or political wheeling and dealing does not suit th

personalities in your organization, an advisory board might help to provide many of the community contacts you will need.

Any group with long term goals should incorporate as a nonprofit, tax exempt corporation as soon as the long range possibilities of the organization become apparent. Incorporation is important as a step towards becoming an independent organization. Before incorporation and receiving tax exempt status, find a church or another nonprofit group to front for you. Donations sent to your organization, via the church, will be tax exempt.

According to the Government, the length of time that an organization has been in operation dates from the incorporation. It doesn't matter how long you have been doing good works before that time. Certain Government funding agencies, and perhaps some foundations, require that you be in operation for 2 years before they'll touch you. We incorporated after RH had been open for a year and a half, just as Second House was pulling together (December, 1970). We should have done it much sooner.

You can file the incorporation papers yourselves, but it would probably be better to find a lawyer who will do it for you for free. (You'll need lawyers to handle other matters for you, at no cost, so track a couple down early in the game.) Incorporate as a nonprofit organization. This reduces taxes, allows you to receive donations without being taxed, and allows other benefits on insurance, buying, etc. You must apply to both Federal and State tax structures. You can even be exempted from paying sales tax. This process may take a long time, depending on the State, etc., so start early. You may be able to get some kind of application-pending status and receive the benefits of nonprofit, tax exempt status while the application is still in the works.

Although our method of fund raising is obviously hazardous, we were able to start and maintain our projects with little financial backing. Using this approach, we have been able to organize projects when the need for them arose, rather than waiting for months to be on secure financial ground. This method works for us, it has for the past 3 years. We would like to have a lot more money, of course. We're not singing the praises of poverty. Financial backing is important, but, when necessary, we know how to start a program on a shoestring. Money eliminates a lot of hassles and time spent doing part-time jobs, etc. If we had more solid financial resources, we would be able to diversify our staff more, expand our existing programs, and start new ones more readily. But finances alone do not determine our plans and are not first priority in deciding whether or not we start new projects. The determination of a need starts the project (we have always been able to find ways to get it together) if the need is great enough.

## Thoughts on Scrounging

1. There is no point in saving money by scrounging food, furniture, and clothing if you waste money in other places, so it is important to be thrifty and frugal—you might even be able to *buy* something once in awhile.
2. When scrounging, consider the time and expense involved. Renting a truck makes whatever you get fairly expensive. So make a friend who has a truck, and plan to save time by making rounds to the places you pick up furniture, food, etc. Spending an afternoon driving 40 miles to pick up one sofa costs half a day's labor. We eventually bought a used van in which we haul furniture, food, and kids.
3. Keep an eye on ads in the newspaper, perhaps someone selling a bed will give it to you if you call him and clearly explain your need.
4. Have Goodwill Industries and other social service agencies refer what they can't use to you.
5. Talk to lumber supply stores about damaged lumber, etc.
6. Paint stores will often give away paint in colors no longer being manufactured.
7. Check with grocery stores, and wholesale food places about their day-old bread, damaged vegetables, etc.
8. When you get publicity, TV or newspaper, mention the things you need and where people can call to make donations.

Scrounging all your food, or most of your supplies is possible, at least in large metropolitan areas. However there is a tremendous amount of work involved. If you decide to take on big-time scrounging, it will probably be necessary to have at least one person who scrounges full time. We are considering this, but have yet to actually hire a scrounger.

Even when it comes to buying things, you can often

swing excellent deals. Maybe someone knows a man who sells appliances wholesale, or a lawyer who handled a case for a man who sells appliances wholesale. When you really brainstorm, you discover that someone always knows someone who knows who can give you a good deal.



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## CHAPTER V. STRUGGLES OF COLLECTIVISM

Paraprofessional youth service projects around the country employ a variety of decisionmaking structures. Many are tied in with a YMCA, a church, or a board of directors which makes the broad policy decisions for the project and supervises much of the daily operation. Others are run by professionals who shoulder most of the decisionmaking power and employ paraprofessionals in lower status jobs—as counselors or "rappers." Some try to work collectively, or communally, and fail because it is much more difficult to rapidly and effectively organize a project when decisions are made by a group. (Rumor has it that the camel is a horse designed by a committee.) However, other projects have succeeded in working collectively (probably by starting with a very small group), and sharing responsibility, while carefully and clearly defining differentiated functions among the members of the group.

### Evolution of the Collective

SAJA grew from the Runaway House which had a residential staff of three counselors to a nonprofit corporation operating a variety of projects with a staff of 22. Decisionmaking changed from benevolent despotism to a collective process with shared overall responsibility but differentiation of work roles.

Bill Treanor was the benevolent despot. He lived at RH for a year as other workers moved through. Bill, with the support and advice of Reverend Tom Murphy, made most policy decisions and ran the show. As the only long-term member of the staff, Bill was the sole person with much information about the community, possible counseling resources, sources of funding, and knowledge of how to run the project. Even after he moved out of the house, he maintained control of this information because RH counselors moved through too quickly to build up such information for themselves. Counselors had to turn to him for help during problems with kids or crises with parents and police. So Treanor was in control for the first year and a half.

In December of 1969, as Second House was being organized, the two projects were incorporated under an umbrella, nonprofit corporation, Special Approaches in Juvenile Assistance. Under the articles of incorporation, Bill Treanor, Tom Murphy, and lawyer Peter Lamb were named directors.

In January, Bill split for a 4-month vacation in Mexico, taking with him his informational service. Judy Seckler, who later became one of the directors of the Washington Free Clinic, temporarily took Bill's place. By this time the staff had grown to include seven people—Judy, Tom, the three RH counselors, and the two staff members at Second House. During the four months that Bill was on vacation, the staff developed a concensus process of decisionmaking. All staff members shared responsibility for making policy decisions for Runaway House and Second House and for SAJA as an organization. Day-to-day decisions, of course, were made by individuals in their respective jobs.

During this time, staff members developed feelings of "being" SAJA rather than working for it. RH and Second House belonged to them as much as the organization belonged to Bill or Tom. These staff members were staying with the projects for a longer time than had previous counselors. Therefore they built up a backlog of skills and information, making Bill's role, as the man with all the answers, less important. The workers also built up a commitment to the success of the organization similar to Treanor's.

Bill returned in May. It took the next 6 to 8 months to evolve a real collective method of decisionmaking. Treanor was extremely committed to the projects and was accustomed to being in control and shouldering most of the responsibility. He was afraid to give up control. Not trusting people's capabilities and judgement, he feared that the projects would fail if decisions were left to the group.

Individual staff members were not willing to give up their feelings of involvement in the organization nor the concensus method of decisionmaking that had developed while Treanor was gone. There was quite a struggle during weekly staff meetings. But no one quit, no one was fired, and a new collective process of decisionmaking evolved.

Tom Murphy was instrumental in facilitating this change. Although he was a director of SAJA, Murphy worked for the Metropolitan Ecumenical Training Center dealing with adults in the suburbs. He was the one person at staff meetings who was not involved in the day-to-day operation of the organization. Therefore, he was able to step back from the situation, observe what was going on and mediate disputes. We also had a personal consultant for the whole staff who helped us

iron out interpersonal conflicts in weekly sessions. A consultant in this role would probably be valuable in helping other organizations through growing pains.

Thus SAJA became a staff collective. All members shared responsibility and concern for the organization. By the winter of 1970, all policy decisions and staff hiring decisions were made within the weekly meeting of the collective—Treanor, Murphy, RH, and Second House staffs and newly hired administrator Steve Lefkowitz. Steve was hired to share the administrative burden with Treanor so that both would be able to spend time with the projects—coordinating things and giving the workers the individual project's "objective" feedback and support.

By the spring of 1971, SAJA had grown to include the Runaway House (which by then had four workers), Second and Third Houses, the Job Co-op (a free job-finding service), two administrative workers, and the secretary. The summer program was in the works—a farm project and a neighborhood youth employment program.

Weekly staff meetings involved 14 people which made consensus difficult. There was also a division of interest and information. For example, the Runaway House counselors felt they had little input to give during discussions of the problems of group foster home kids. An effort was made to cut down on the time spent in these large meetings by establishing separate meeting times for the RH and group foster home workers to discuss problems specific to their projects, with the administrators. Staff meetings were reserved for the discussion of SAJA-wide issues and more general reports on the individual projects. By the summer, we had established a collective decisionmaking structure, which makes the decisionmaking process more effective. We set up a decisionmaking subcollective for each project. (Tom Murphy phased himself out at this point because he could not attend so many meetings.)

The decisionmaking structure was decentralized into natural groupings of staff interest. At the present time (winter, 1972) the Runaway House, the group foster homes (Second and Third Houses), the Job Co-op, and the SAJA free high school make up four project collectives. (In the summer of '71 we had a summer project collective of the farm and Neighborhood Youth Corps project staffs, which eventually broke down into two smaller collectives.) These collectives are made up of the staff members of the individual projects plus the two SAJA administrators who act as coordinators between collectives. We tried an exchange of representatives among collectives, but that did not work. People were constantly attending meetings—not working with kids.

Decisions concerning the individual projects—especially staff selection—are made at a weekly meeting of each collective. Decisions about new projects, distribution of finances, and other issues concerning the whole community of projects are made at "superstaff" meetings. This is a gathering of all the SAJA workers every Friday. We also have weekend retreats approximately every 4 months to hassle out more time-consuming problems and plans—and to play together.

We have found that the projects that form a subcollective must have some kind of relationship, so that their working together is complementary. There has to be a reason for these people to meet together. We originally formed a "summer projects collective"—lumping together the farm project and the city-based neighborhood youth employment program (which we subcontracted from the citywide Neighborhood Youth Corps program). We put the two programs together in one collective because we thought that the NYC kids would use the farm a lot. However, the NYC program stayed city-focused and there were no decisions that the staffs of the two programs needed to make together. Because the summer program collective was not a natural grouping of interest, and the two programs did not overlap as we had thought they would, we split the collective up and the two staffs met with the administrators separately.

It may seem strange to set aside specific meeting times for people who work and live together all the time anyway—as in the case of the Runaway House collective. However, individual workers' time off plus the amount of work that needs to be done often get in the way of everyone just sitting down to talk. We have found that it is very important to establish a specific time each week in which project decisions can be made and interpersonal conflicts can be discussed with the support of one of the administrative workers.

Collectivism in SAJA involves shared responsibility with differentiation of jobs among the workers. Staff morale is high, stemming from our feelings of identity as members of the collective rather than employees of a corporation. Personal commitment and control of the individual projects by the people working in them also contribute to this feeling of well-being. There is a philosophical difference, if not a practical difference between freedom and responsibility that is given to a

staff by liberal executives, who are actually in control of a program, and the freedom and responsibility that arise out of the interaction of equals. The collective method of operation makes what we do completely ours. This is our communal struggle and responsibility.

This collective structure has special advantages for projects that work with people. Social service projects must be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the community and the individuals with whom they work. Although workers in traditional social service agencies may recognize a need for flexibility within their agencies, these workers have little power to change the institutions. A juvenile court worker may realize that present laws and court procedures are inadequate, but is unable to change them. A psychiatrist in a community mental health clinic often has little power (or investment) in influencing the orientation of the clinic. Our collective method gives us the ability to change, when SAJA workers see the need for it, without red tape or bureaucratic hassles. (We don't have to send in reports, we don't have to seek permission from a board of directors; it doesn't take months to effect necessary change.)

There has been no problem with rapid, chaotic change for the sake of change itself. If anything, we are over-cautious. We don't legislate untested "good ideas" but make decisions for change that evolve naturally from our past experience. Thus the group foster homes, for example, have changed from a structured, nuclear family type setup to more of a communal living situation with the kids integrally involved in making house decisions.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to share responsibility because of old male/female roles. During collective meetings women may sit back while the more aggressive, and vocal, males take over. On the other hand, the men are set up by the women to "take care of things" and generally get stuck with making difficult decisions or dealing with bureaucrats. This can happen especially in the group foster homes where it is very easy to fall into traditional male/female roles. We are all working to maintain an awareness of this problem to free ourselves from stereotyped ways of relating to each other and to better share work and responsibility.

When responsibility for decisionmaking is shared equally by many people with different interests, it is often difficult to set priorities. A very productive tension has sprung up as a result of some SAJA members' desires and abilities to start new projects and the desires of other workers that existing programs be strengthened or expanded before energy and money are put into new programs. This natural system of checks and balances has allowed us to maintain the creativity and potential of the organization, which gives it life and vitality, while moving slowly enough to make sure that existing projects are stable before energy resources are diverted elsewhere.

At times the needs of different project collectives come into conflict during superstaff meetings. This happens primarily when we are attempting to decide on the division of our financial resources. This is always hassled out collectively, with each individual presenting his or her project's needs to the rest of the SAJA workers. Sometimes this conflict of interest takes a long time to work out collectively, but we feel that this is the most effective means of dealing with people's interests and feelings.

Policy can be very vague when made by a group. Each member may leave a lengthy, laborious staff meeting with his own interpretation of the decisions made. It is very helpful if at least one member of the group is skillful in clarifying and defining what has been going on at the end of the meetings.

Decisions can also be heavily influenced by the strength of individual personalities, by personality clashes, and by time factors. We've found that business decisions are influenced as much, if not more, by personalities as by practicalities. This is not bad, it is just true. Interpersonal problems which influence decision-making can be dealt with through a high level of awareness by all members who must be willing to honestly confront these conflicts. Since the outcome of superstaff decisions affects all of us, it is everyone's business to intervene if it becomes obvious that workers are clashing over interpersonal problems rather than the issue being discussed.

Our most vague decisions are reached at the tail-end of a 4 or 5 hour meeting. It is important for group members to be aware of the time factor. Many people tune out of the discussion from weariness. The skills of the "definer" are again useful here. We usually try to set up a manageable agenda of things to be discussed and attempt to keep to the approximately 3½ hour time limit that we set for superstaff meetings.

While responsibility is shared collectively, there is still a need for role differentiation and delegation of work. Therefore we have defined job slots: worker at Runaway House, worker in the group homes, worker in the Job Co-op, administrator, etc. Work like fundraising, com-

munity contact, and keeping the books takes time away from the actual purpose of the youth project—working with kids. If these functions can be delegated to one or two workers who like dealing with these vital details, the other workers will be free to carry on the project.

Work within the project can be divided up so that routine work is shared, and interesting work is divided up according to individual desires and abilities. For example, in Third House, one worker handles the books, correspondence, and agency contact details, while another of the workers is responsible for upkeep, repairs, and licensing of the SAJA van—which Third House uses a lot. They all share the work with the kids. We have found that the only way to actually get work done is to define pretty clearly who does what. Otherwise, everything gets muddled—fun work may be done doubly, and routine work slides by.

Collectivism involves mutual support and mutual criticism. This calls for a high level of awareness in each individual. He must know what the other people working around him need in terms of emotional support and constructive criticism. This demands a high level of respect among workers plus a willingness to be honestly critical. It also calls for a lack of defensiveness—an openness to criticism.

To facilitate our working together supportively, yet critically, workers in the individual projects meet with volunteer consultants. These consultants provide further feedback on the operation of the various programs and help project workers deal with their problems with each other. We are working towards a willingness to accept criticism, but we are all human. We are all very personally tied to the projects with which we are working. Therefore the extra support and feedback from project consultants is extremely important in keeping us aware of what we are doing and in cutting down on defensiveness about our work. (Information about finding and working with consultants is detailed in the Runaway House and group foster homes chapters.)

This collective operation, mutual support, and mutual criticism, leads to a feeling of interdependence among staff members. Working in SAJA—especially in the 24-hour-per-day jobs—demands a total involvement and commitment to the goals of the organization. Therefore the collective model is vital. It allows for this commitment and for the importance of each individual within the organization.

Although everyone is to be equally critical in a collective, one person may be set up to be the "bad guy." Often groups will define one person as the "parent" of the group to make people toe the line so that individuals do not have to take total responsibility for setting their own expectations. Many of the difficulties we have had stem from our inability to set and meet expectations for ourselves. We have no collective models to draw from. Bill Treanor had difficulty extricating himself from the role of benevolent despot because members of the staff continually set him up to "parent" the group. Since this fit into his former way of doing things it was difficult for him to resist. Treanor is now refusing acceptance of this role as much as possible which forces responsibility back onto the group. Our combined past experience has involved living up to others' expectations in school, at home, and in previous jobs. Setting our own expectations is a constant struggle.

SAJA's division into sub-collectives, i.e., breaking down into natural groupings of common interest in a specific activity, facilitates the collective decisionmaking process. This allows the organization to grow without becoming cumbersome. The collective structure allows decisions specific to individual projects to be made by the people with the most information about the program. The input of the administrators, who are also members of the four project collectives, coordinates the work of the projects.

Breaking up into smaller collectives can be divisive, leading to competition among projects for money or prestige. Total identification with a project can lead to defensiveness and rigidity by staff members. If this parochialism cuts down on identification with the larger SAJA collective, the staff may become afraid of innovation and may hinder development of new projects and extension of existing programs. Therefore the coordinating skills of the administrators are vital in keeping this from happening.

There has been much discussion lately among SAJA workers about where things are heading. There are a couple of clear points of view. Some workers see the larger collective, superstaff, as the most exciting part of SAJA. They are into community building—developing ways that a large group of people, who share common goals although have different interests, can work together and develop healthy personal relationships that go beyond functional work relationships. They see a potential for creativity in the larger collective—mutual support and feedback as well as membership in a community of people. These individuals are excited by

the strength shown in the smaller collectives and want that to develop again in gatherings of the larger group. (Back when the staff numbered only eight or 10, staff meetings were fun, stimulating, and at times heavy with confrontations. People dealt with each other on a very personal level even during meetings. This does not happen as often now that the group has grown to 22.)

Another group of people on the staff want to devote their time and energies more exclusively to the smaller collectives. They see more potential for personal support and satisfaction among a smaller group of people. These individuals want superstaff meetings to evolve even more into business meetings. This would leave the heavier confrontations and personal relationships to the more intimate project collectives where there is more common ground among the members.

This shows, in part, an alienation from SAJA. People who are new on the staff have a tendency to fall into the feeling of working "for" SAJA rather than "being" SAJA. If SAJA becomes a "thing" in people's minds, if the corporation becomes inanimate to the project workers, we will fall into the same alienation felt by workers in traditional jobs. We all share a responsibility to new staff members to draw them into the collective SAJA so that they do not feel that they are working for the "thing" SAJA. Those of us who have been around for a while have an identification with the collective, having shared in its evolution, that must be encouraged in each new member. We are beginning to develop a staff training program that will quickly integrate new workers into the collective by providing better training in their specific jobs as well as involvement in all the other SAJA projects. Hopefully this will help to speed up the process by which new workers come to feel that SAJA is theirs.

Our collectivism depends upon very selective staffing. Hiring is crucial because each worker must be a member of the tribe as well as effectively working with kids. Many people who can relate well to the young people in the houses cannot live and work with their peers in the intense atmosphere of Runaway House or the group foster homes. Hiring depends on the personality of the individual and how he complements the abilities of the people already in the project. Yet we are a very diverse group. We are not looking for identical people, but for individuals who add to the total capability of the project in dealing with problems with kids and working collectively. Therefore SAJA is made up of fairly strong-willed, opinionated, creative people—different in personality but alike in their commitment to the goals of the working collective. Since we are living/working a philosophy and a lifestyle, that commitment is vital.

## Hiring Staff

New staff members for Runaway House were originally hired by Bill Treanor in consultation with Tom Murphy and the existing RH staff members. However during the months that Bill was in Mexico in 1970, new counselors were hired by staff consensus. The consensus method has stuck ever since.

When SAJA was only RH and Second House, applicants were required to meet all members of the staff and to spend several days working in both houses. The entire staff made the final hiring decision by consensus at a weekly staff meeting. This was very productive when the organization was small. All staff members developed skills in running both houses. Therefore counselors in the two houses could sub for each other. Also, in the living/working trial situation, the applicant had a good chance to get to know everyone.

However, by the time Third House was added to the collective, the applicants were getting lost in the shuffle between houses as they tried to meet and work with nine people. So we changed the policy, requiring people on trial to work in the project to which they were applying and to meet as many staff people as they could.

Eventually the collective structure evolved. It had become extremely difficult for all staff members to get to know a new applicant. Therefore staffing decisions were delegated to the separate subcollectives. (The whole collective decides on hiring administrators, since they work with all the projects.) Decisions on new staff are now made by the people involved in the collective containing the project in which the applicant wants to work.

Since we operate collectively, people who write in asking about jobs are told that they must come to town to meet everyone before they can be hired. (They are warned that distance traveled has no bearing on the hiring process.) People looking for work with SAJA are first interviewed at the office by one of the administrators. The purpose of this initial interview is to let the individual know what we do and what we're looking for. We can also find out what he is into and in search of. This interview weeds out people who obviously have no potential for being hired as well as those who decide they don't want a job with us.

The applicant is then introduced to the workers in the project he wishes to apply to. The workers talk with him for a long time and must decide if there is a possibility that he could fit into the job. If they feel that he can, he is asked to return to the project to work for a week or so, on trial (and to live in the house if the project is housed). He is expected to do the same kind of work the staff does, working closely with individual staff members. The applicant is also expected to take initiative in meeting and talking to the other members of the collective. For example, if he applies to Second House, he must work with the Second House counselors and must also spend time with the two administrators, the support worker for the two group homes, and the two workers at Third House. These people make up the group foster home collective and are responsible for making the final decision on hiring.

Selecting staff is difficult because most of the qualities we are looking for are intangibles—like sensitivity to kids, the ability to perceive and relate to a wide range of personal needs, and compatibility with people already working in the project. We have no requirements for college background or degrees. Most of the people we hire are over 21. We expect staff applicants to show initiative and enthusiasm. New staff members must be able to work well in an unsupervised environment; therefore, initiative and creativity are especially important. Often it comes down to the fact that a person "feels right" for a wide variety of reasons.

Obviously our reasons for not hiring an individual may be equally nebulous—he or she may just not "feel right." We do feel strongly that members of the collective must be unanimously positive about a person being hired. However, this unanimity may contain certain reservations that are communicated to the individual and resolved during the first trial month after he is hired.

Many people weed themselves out during this hiring process. Some do not feel that they can work in such a demanding but unstructured situation. Others feel that they cannot make the emotional commitment to the kids or to the collective or the time commitment required by SAJA. This is why the living/working trial period is necessary. People can find out about the job by living/working without making a final commitment.

After a week or so, the tentative hiring decision is made by consensus in a meeting of the project collective directly concerned. If an applicant is hired there is a 30-day trial period. He becomes a fully responsible member of the collective, but he is not finally accepted until a review meeting 30 days later. The new staff member sits in on this review session (a policy begun by the fall of 1970). Thus he can hear the criticisms that people have of him, as well as their support. This feedback is very important for the new staff member. These meetings can be extremely awkward as workers try to honestly express their doubts and feelings about the new member. So far, no one has been asked to leave after the 30-day trial period.

Staffing decisions are personal and quite difficult. During the applicant's initial trial week, we spend a lot of time working and talking with him. Often we really grow to like an individual, yet do not feel that he can handle the job in question. It is really painful to tell a new friend that we are not willing to hire him. Back in the old days Bill Treanor was stuck with this distasteful chore, but now the responsibility is shared by the members of the project. We try to be very honest with him and also to deal with his feelings about not being hired. While this method of hiring is time-consuming and even painful, we feel that no other process will ensure that competent people are hired. Rather than hire people who are not effective and compatible, we often work for months short of staff. This is rough, but we see no alternative.

We have had no staff training program per se and are now in the process of developing one. Under this program, new staff members would work in the houses into which they were hired. They would also work for a short time in SAJA's other projects in order to get a feel for the operation of the community of projects. The two training coordinators hired for the program would set up training sessions involving representatives of public and private social welfare agencies, the police and the courts as well as psychiatrists and psychologists. This would give our staff members a head start in knowing the community resources available to them and would train them in counseling skills. Youth workers from other cities would receive training structured to specifically meet their needs.

Right now a new staff member is trained in the project into which he is hired—learning by doing. He works closely with the SAJA workers, at first sitting in on counseling sessions, job interviews, or groups, as an observer. The new worker gradually takes on more responsibility over a period of a few days as he shows skill and confidence in handling things. He picks up most of his knowledge of community resources by rapping with the other workers and as he works with the

problems of individual kids—tracking down lawyers, caseworkers, psychiatric help, school placements, and jobs. He also works with our volunteer consultants and picks up a lot of knowledge from them.

At this stage of the game the new workers do not spend much time, while training or otherwise working in the other SAJA projects. Therefore, it takes a long time for them to get an overview of the entire organization and to feel a part of a working community. This leads to the problems we described before—new workers may feel that they work "for" SAJA rather than feeling membership in SAJA.

It takes 2 or 3 months for a new staff member to really become effective since he has to learn by osmosis. Project workers do not have the time to spare to introduce him to contacts in courts, mental health clinics, job situations, etc. He pretty much has to make his own way. We had not had the money to hire anyone to specifically handle staff training until the NIMH grant came through.

The struggle that we went through to become a collective was pretty natural. It came about as each of us became aware of our own importance and needs for an equal share in making decisions. This evolution would not have come about were we not deeply committed to SAJA people and the projects we were sharing in. The Rasberry book on free schools (*Rasberry Exercises: How to Start Your own School and Make a Book,* by Robert Greenway and Salli Rasberry) suggests that people organizing projects might start with an authoritarian in charge to get things rolling quickly because the natural struggle for shared responsibility will follow. This is certainly true in the history of our organization.

However, other groups who want to start with a collective model should be able to do so, if the original group is not too large (perhaps five to seven people), and if a clear decisionmaking structure is agreed upon. Work must be divided and functions agreed upon so that people can get on with the day-to-day work of the project without continual hassles about who does what. Broad decisions fall to the larger group, but the individuals within the collective must have a clear idea of their own functions and what decisions are left to them. This calls for trust and honesty among the members of the collective as each member makes a lot of decisions on his own, with the support and feedback of the collective.

It may be important for the collective to designate someone as a coordinator who deals with the outside world—agencies, police, housing inspectors, funding sources, and public contact. It is very helpful if one person handles all the details of dealing with such bureaucracies. You have to be able to cope with them and will run into trouble if your dealings with them are confused and chaotic. It is important to present a consistent, united picture to the rest of the world. This coordinator function also frees the rest of the people to devote most of their time to working with kids.

Because the coordinator has a corner on most of the information about what is going on between the project and the various bureaucracies and the community, it is vital that he share this information with the other members of the collective. He has all the contacts and is the only one who knows how to raise money, how to deal with agency heads, etc. If he leaves, without transferring this information, the project will become isolated, unable to deal with the society in which it exists, and will have to regress while contacts are made all over again.

We have been muddling along with this problem of the centralization of so much information about SAJA in the hands of the administrators for a long time now and have not come up with much in the way of a solution. While some SAJA workers in the projects complain that they are not informed about what is going on in the office, the administrators counter with the fact that few of the workers take the time to find out what is going on.

Time is the problem. Everyone is overworked and people can't devote much energy to staying on top of the information that the administrators are acquiring. With no solutions at hand, we are stating that this is a problem that people organizing projects must be aware of.

The evolution of the SAJA collective has been the project of our own personal growth and changing levels of awareness. For example, after 3 years of operation, we became aware of the "age chauvinism" that we had been practicing in leaving the young people we were working with out of the decisionmaking process. While we considered the kids part of SAJA, they actually had little of the control over their own lives that we wanted so much in our lives. When we came to that realization, things started changing. Now the school and the group homes operate collectively. A few of the kids in the group foster homes have started working in other projects. For example, one of the girls in Second House is a regular worker in the Job Co-op. These young people are regular members of the SAJA superstaff.

SAJA is continually growing and changing and being reshaped as we add projects and new staff and as we feel different organizational and personal needs. We have a commitment to concensus and collectivity as goals toward which we are working. Yet we do not have a commitment to a specific structure of organization and will continually reevaluate and revise the working structures within which we operate as a collective.

## GLOSSARY

There are certain words in this handbook that are not used in their strict literal sense. They have been given more imagistic definitions that describe situations often encountered by members of urban "street cultures." Translations follow:

**Busted**—arrested
**Collared**—inhibited, entrapped, held
**Crash**—to stop, to sleep, withdrawing from drug trip, exhaustion
**Crash pad**—place to relax, agitation free refuge, haven
**Cream**—take from the top
**Creamed**—struck hard
**Freak**—a heavily involved individual or one who exhibits unorthodox behavior
**Freak out**—consequences of excessive involvement
**Hassle**—a disagreement, or to agitate
**Hip**—aware
**Narc**—narcotic officer
**Number**—procedure, a study of someone, following one's own impulses
**Rap**—converse
**Scrounging**—scavenging
**Shrink**—a psychiatrist
**Trip**—an experience
**Together**—stable
**Trucking**—sustained effort, continuing some activity
**Vibes**—favorable or unfavorable reactions from someone



* U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1974 731-961/168

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DHEW Publication No. (ADM) 74–44
Printed 1974

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

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